The Early Indians

Their Natural and Imaginary Worlds



Charles Paul May

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Also by Charles Paul May

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VETERINARIANS AND THEIR PATIENTS
WHEN ANIMALS CHANGE CLOTHES
WOMEN IN AERONAUTICS

The Early Indians

Their Natural and Imaginary Worlds

by

CHARLES PAUL MAY

Thomas Nelson Inc.

New York / Camden

To Ellen V. McLoughlin, Helen H. Merrick,
and Louise I. McDowell,
who taught me much about writing,
and to Paul Carpenter

 Published in Camden, New Jersey, by Thomas Nelson Inc. and simultaneously in Don Mills, Ontario, by Thomas Nelson & Sons (Canada) Limited. Manufactured in the United States of America.

First edition

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 77–140077
ISBN 0–8407–6132–5 (trade); ISBN 0–8407–6133–3 (library)

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Foreword

In the last third of the twentieth century, man seems to be relearning how important natural surroundings have always been to the human race. It is hoped that a book about people who depended heavily on nature to survive will make readers more aware of our surroundings and the need to save our environment from destruction. Some Indians of North America preserved the animals and plants in their territories; others did not. But they all relied on nature for food, for clothing, and for shelter.

To tell all the ways in which each tribe north of Mexico depended on and thought about nature would take a huge volume, so a few tribes from some of the major Indian areas have been chosen for inclusion. Some chapters will emphasize dwellings and home life, some hunting, some clothing; no chapter will attempt to give a complete picture of any tribe's way of life. It is hoped this book will lead to the reading of other works on similar subjects; a list of especially interesting ones will be given at the

back of the book. Some of these present a more complete picture of certain tribes, but this book should give the reader a feeling for the relationships of early man with his natural surroundings. It will also provide material for comparisons and contrasts.

Since the early Indian tribes had no written languages —as we think of written languages today—their ways of life have only been recorded since the arrival of Europeans in the New World. Indian life didn't change immediately, of course, and so we have many old reports that give us a picture of Indian ways as they existed before white men brought changes. For the most part, this book tells how the people of North America lived before the ways of foreigners were introduced by example and by force.

In those days, four hundred and more years ago, legends were the history and the natural science of the Indians. The people didn't bandy them about like ordinary stories, but respected them as modern people respect biblical tales or documented history. In their time the Indians accepted the stories with complete seriousness, and many honest facts were contained in them. Even legends based entirely on imagination tell us something about the people who believed in them, so they shouldn't be read just for amusement but for the information they can give us about the peoples who told them.

This book includes numerous legends. The coyote occurred in the tales of a great many tribes. So did the thunderbird, which Indians thought produced thunder by flapping its wings. Because snake stories occurred among all tribes and because snakes held a special fascination for Indians, they have received particular attention here. However, in the course of the chapters readers will find

other animals which received more than passing notice in Indian lore.

The reader may also notice many interesting things about the geography of the United States and Canada. Long ago, places had names that have since been lost or that are completely meaningless to us today. For this reason, today's geographical terms have been used. When the book refers to the United States, Canada, Alaska, Alberta, California, Illinois, Quebec, or North Carolina, it means those areas that have those names now, but it should be kept in mind that the names were usually given at a later time than the period covered here. The Snake River, which had an Indian name that meant "snake," became the *Snake* only after white men put its name into English. The Catawba is pronounced and spelled the way its Indian name sounded to early white explorers.

It seemed unnecessary to pinpoint where every clan of every tribe lived. Instead, tribes are placed where large numbers or main bodies existed. As a result, a tribe found in parts of three states may be mentioned in only two, but this should at least give a general impression about the area occupied. For those who wish to know more about Indian life and natural history, there are always those other books to be read.

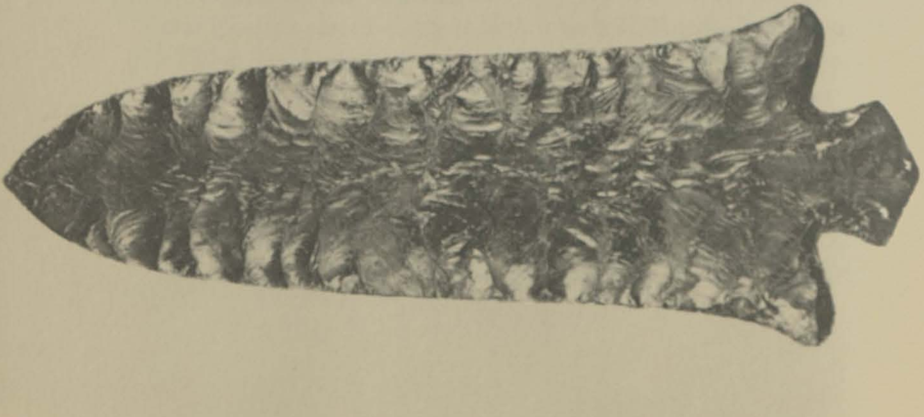
CHARLES PAUL MAY

New York City, 1971



The Great Serpent Mound of the Hopewell Indians, Adams County, Ohio. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

Obsidian ceremonial blade. It was found, together with carvings of animals, in a Hopewell mound. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



CHAPTER ONE

Near the Ohio River

Many Indian cultures existed and passed away in North America before white men arrived. Because the ancient peoples left no written records, we can learn little about them. Yet some of their belongings have withstood decay and weathering, telling us something of the tribes. If archaeologists or other scientists dig up figures of snakes from sites where the old tribes lived, we can guess that reptiles interested those people.

Occasionally, digging isn't necessary. In southwestern Ohio, a giant dirt snake lies stretched across the ground for a quarter of a mile. Because it is clearly the figure of a snake, it has been named Serpent Mound. And because it makes all other snakelike mounds in the world look small, it often goes by the name "Great Serpent Mound." Its head alone reaches more than half the length of a snake mound near Peterborough, Ontario.

Who piled up the tons of dirt to make Serpent Mound? No one knows. When white men reached southern Ohio, Shawnee Indians occupied the area and could report noth-

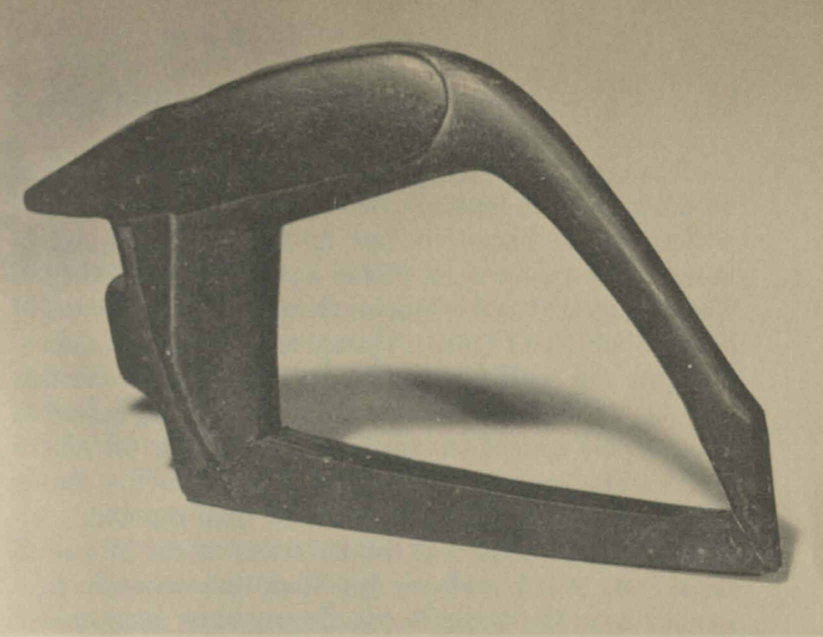
ing about earlier tribes. Unable to give the ancient Indians exact names, scientists call them Mound Builders. Men digging into the mounds have named the old cultures after farms on which some mounds lay—the Adena and the Hopewell cultures.

The Adena Indians and the Hopewell Indians may have been part of the same tribe or they may have been separate tribes. Perhaps one culture is older than the other, but anthropologists, scientists who study human life, cannot say for sure. It seems likely, however, that the Indians who built Serpent Mound lived from about five hundred years before Christ was born until about five hundred years after. They are usually called the Hopewell. They, or similar groups, also lived in West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.

Undoubtedly, the Hopewell Indians considered snakes highly important. Why else would Serpent Mound be the largest animal mound they ever built? The body weaves through seven great curves, and the mouth stands open as if to grab something. In front of the mouth is an oval mound, and beyond that lies another figure. Some scientists think the oval and additional figure are part of the snake's head.

The Hopewell planned Serpent Mound with care, which indicates it had great importance for them. Before starting to build, they outlined the shape of the body with rocks and lumps of clay. Hundreds of people must have worked months, perhaps years, carrying the dirt in baskets woven of reeds, bark, or other plant fibers. Several low areas nearby show where the people dug some of the dirt.

Scorched rocks on top of the serpent's head prove that the Hopewell built fires there. This leads scientists to believe the figure had religious meaning. Like some later tribes, the Hopewell probably thought their wishes rose



Pipe of red stone representing a crane. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

to supernatural beings in a world above them along with the smoke of sacred fires. It is thought these people raised tobacco, and they may have been among the first Indians to burn tobacco as an offering to the spirits in which they believed.

Several Indian tribes have looked on snakes as symbols of fertility, because a mother snake often produces dozens of young. The Indians called on snakes when they wanted more children to be born into the tribe. Serpent Mound may have been built in hopes it would please the spirits, who would then help the Hopewell to become more numerous. Since many Hopewell groups apparently died out, they may have built the mound when warfare, droughts, or diseases were killing them off rapidly. A carving found in another mound shows a man with a snake figure on his

breechcloth. This also indicates that the Hopewell looked on the snake as a fertility symbol.

Carvings of humans found in Hopewell and Adena mounds often show short, plump figures with slanted eyes. These suggest that the Indians themselves were probably short, stocky, and Oriental in appearance. Some anthropologists use such figures as an indication that the first men in North America came from Asia. Many scientists believe they came from northern Asia by way of Alaska when a land or an ice bridge existed where the Bering Strait now separates the New World from the Old.

Other suggestions that the ancestors of the Hopewell came from Asia have been dug from their mounds. In a mound near the Great Serpent, men have uncovered a snake figure carved in mica. It has horns, and many horned serpents occur in the legends of later tribes. This could be a carry-over of the Oriental belief in dragons.

The mound of the horned snake had been used for burying people, probably chiefs or priests. Some later tribes looked on snakes as symbols of long life. Because a snake sheds its skin, the Indians thought it renewed its life and could perhaps go on living forever. Very possibly, the Hopewell buried the horned serpent with their chiefs or priests in hopes it would help them live forever in their next life.

No bodies have been found in Serpent Mound and probably none will be. It undoubtedly had religious importance, for burial mounds are smaller and look like little hills rather than animals. Burial mounds could have been built by wandering tribes who lived by killing animals, but Serpent Mound was built by Indians who stayed in one place a long time. This indicates that they remained settled, and so must have farmed the land.

From the mounds men have dug evidence of corn (or maize, as it is sometimes called), squash, beans, and tobacco. Later tribes, such as the Iroquois, had popcorn, sweet corn, and others, which they developed by cultivating wild varieties. But the Hopewell probably had one kind, a hard grain known as flint corn. They ate this corn themselves, for they had no livestock. Their one domestic animal was the dog.

To plant their fields, they cleared away sassafras, dogwood, maple, oak, elm, poplar, hickory, beech, black walnut, buckeye, ash, hemlock, pine, and other trees. On some of these grew wild grape and sumac vines. In clearings, there were blackberry bushes. From the trees, bushes, and undergrowth the Hopewell frightened cardinals, kingfishers, blackbirds, robins, pheasants, grouse, partridge, and quail, some of which they shot and ate. They also chased out squirrels, cottontail rabbits, foxes, skunks, raccoons, deer, wolf, and bear. Along Brush Creek they probably hunted ducks, geese, and loons, as well as beaver, mink, and muskrat.

If they fished, the Hopewell might have caught bass, pickerel, crappie, bluegill, sunfish, carp, and bullhead. In or near water they also would have found musk turtles, snappers, soft-shelled turtles, and mud turtles, and in the fields they undoubtedly came upon box turtles. Several kinds of toads and frogs lived around them. Quite common were American and Fowler's toads, chorus frogs, tree frogs, spring peepers, bullfrogs, wood frogs, and leopard frogs.

Serpent Mound could represent one of many kinds of snakes found in southern Ohio. The Hopewell encountered such dangerous snakes as copperheads, massasauga rattlers, and timber rattlers. But more often they came



upon harmless ones, such as ring-necked snakes, black rat snakes, king snakes, garter snakes, blue and black racers, water snakes, hog-nosed snakes, and green snakes.

Despite the size of Serpent Mound, scientists think another animal held more interest for some of the Hopewell Indians than snakes. A figure of a hawklike bird has been found in several mounds, so groups of the Hopewell may have considered an eagle or hawk as their guardian spirit. Some scientists believe the figure represents the duck hawk, for it was common where the Hopewell lived.

When white men arrived in the New World, they found that most Indian tribes were divided into clans and that clans had animal totems. A totem was an animal from which the clan supposedly descended or an animal that was closely associated with the first ancestor of the group. The fox, wolf, bear, and turtle enjoyed particular popularity among Indian totems in the eastern half of the United States. But some clans looked to birds. The duck hawk, also known as the peregrine falcon, likely served as the totem of some of the Hopewell.

We will probably never know much about the Mound Builders known as the Hopewell. But we understand even less about many of the tribes who lived before them or about their Asiatic ancestors. The Hopewell are a link between the Orientals who migrated to the New World and the tribes found in North America by white men. And Serpent Mound helps us realize how important snakes and all other forms of nature were to Indians everywhere.

The duck hawk, or peregrine falcon, was plentiful in Hopewell times but is rare today. (*Photo by Luther C. Goldman, courtesy of United States Department of the Interior–Sport Fisheries & Wildlife*)



Delaware father and son. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

CHAPTER TWO

Along the Delaware River

White men found numerous Indian tribes living in the forests of eastern and northern North America. Many tribes spoke similar languages, a sign that they were related. One family of languages spoken by many groups was called the Algonkian, or Algonquian. Tribes using this language often used their word for "grandfather" when speaking of the Delaware, or Lenni-Lenape, Indians.

Could all Algonkian-speaking tribes be the offspring of the Delaware? That is highly unlikely. Some were, but some tribes called the Delaware "grandfather" out of respect. The Delaware called themselves Lenni-Lenape, which can be translated as "the real men" or "the original men." These Indians lived along a river that the English named for Lord De La Warr, governor of Virginia colony. In time, the Indians as well as the river became known as the Delaware.

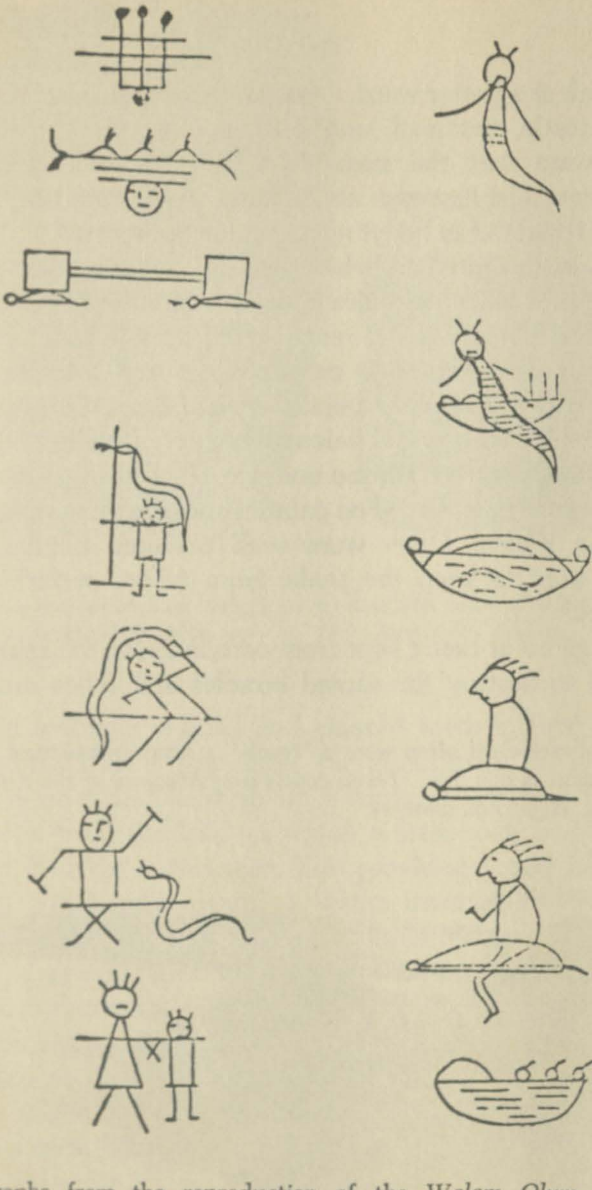
Until white men taught them how to put words on paper, the Indians of North America passed history and leg-

ends along by word of mouth. Priests, wise old men, medicine men, chiefs, or good storytellers related the tales, and young listeners kept the myths in mind to pass on in their turn. In time, the Delaware Indians learned to record the essential parts of their stories through pictures painted in red on sticks. And although the sticks have been lost, we know of one of the most famous recordings of any Indian legend through a reproduction made by Delaware Indians in modern times. This is the pictograph sequence called the *Walam Olum*. Turned into English, *Walam Olum* becomes "Red Score," which can be further translated as "Painted Record."

Scientists agree the *Walam Olum* gives some actual history of the Delaware peoples. The first section, in particular, has been connected to actual events of the past. It indicates that the distant ancestors of the Delaware may have crossed from northeast Asia to Alaska soon after the birth of Christ. After hundreds of years they finally reached the eastern woodlands.

A snake occurs in the second of the five songs, or books, of the *Walam Olum*. This part of the legend hardly stands as history, but it makes an exciting story. The word for snake in the Delaware language had two meanings. It could mean "evil spirit," and in this sense it appears as a drawing of a serpent in the pictographs. Or it could mean "enemy," and might apply to any Indian tribe that opposed the Delaware. In the second song of the *Walam Olum,* the snake is an evil spirit, which changes the lives of the Delaware Indians and scatters them throughout the eastern woodlands.

Many creatures lived near the Delaware River, and the Indians believed they had been created by *manitous*. *Manitous* were powerful forces that we might call spirits



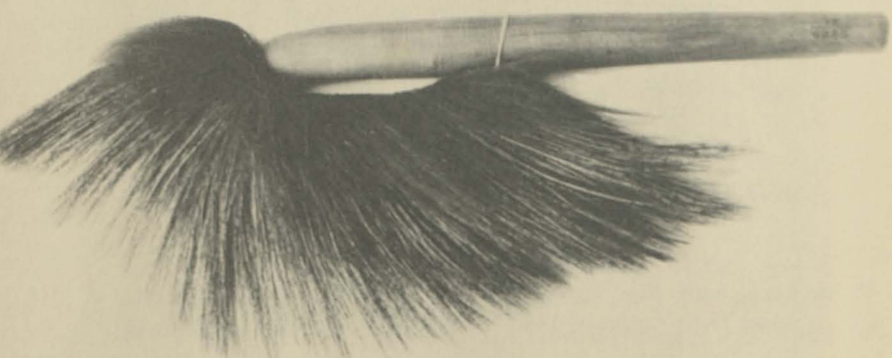
Pictographs from the reproduction of the *Walam Olum* (*The Lenape and Their Legends*—1885— by Daniel G. Brinton)

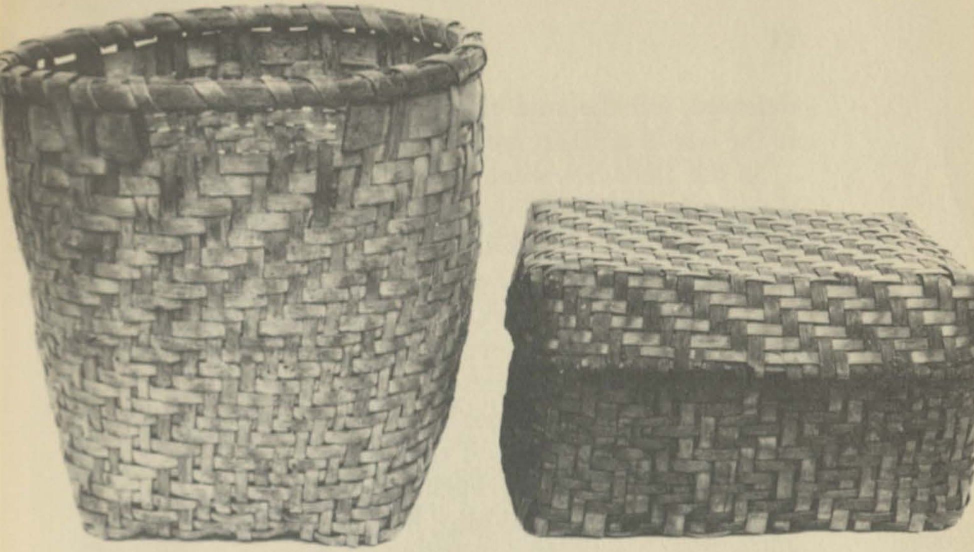
for lack of a better word. One *manitou* made man, woman, fish, turtle, mammal, and bird, and he was good. The Delaware said the snake had been created by a bad *manitou*. The first men and women were giants and might have remained so had it not been for the snake.

In an ancient time, when men, the big men, first dwelt along the Delaware, there lived a strong snake. The snake, who was hated, tried to reach forbidden places. The Delaware Indians set aside certain spots and forbade their people to go to them except at special times. For instance, they tied certain tribal belongings into a bundle that they considered sacred, and no one was allowed to go near the tree where this hung. The painted sticks making up a book of the *Walam Olum* were such a sacred bundle. The men tried to keep the snake from taboo, or forbidden, places.

Angered at being kept from certain spots, the snake decided to destroy the sacred bundles and taboo areas. It

A Delaware chief often wore a "roach," a head ornament of fur or hair, such as this one. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)





The Delaware wove firm baskets as well as the sides of their huts. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

brought water in a bowl and poured forth a flood that covered the land. A big rabbit, the grandfather of people, swam to an island held up by a turtle. The rabbit freed the turtle from the land to which it had been tied so it could rise as the waters rose. This provided Turtle Island, toward which men swam. A water monster swallowed some of them, but the monster's daughter came with a boat and saved others. The water monster in the modern Delaware drawings has some resemblance to a snake, one more indication that these Indians looked on serpents as evil spirits and on evil spirits as serpents.

The rabbit guided the turtle about in the waters to pick up men. Once they climbed onto Turtle Island, the men called for an end to the flood, singing "magical songs" and chanting "strong formulas." These ended the flood, leaving only lakes and rivers. The snake, feeling

defeated, left the land of the Delaware, who had shrunk to the size of ordinary men and had become scattered.

As the Delaware went about their daily tasks, did they meet only "good" mammals, birds, fish, and turtles and only "bad" snakes? Naturally not, for they lived in an area where most snakes proved harmless and some animals, such as wolves, could be dangerous. Snakes, however, served little purpose in the Indians' daily living, while many other creatures proved useful.

Although every member of the Delaware tribe learned about the snake story and the rest of the *Walam Olum* while he was young, he might hear the entire legend cycle only a few times during his life. Its telling was entrusted to certain high-ranking chiefs, who carried the bundles of sticks with them from village to village. They made their rounds in warm weather, when Indians generally counted on a plentiful supply of food for feasting. A chief visited only a few settlements each summer, so many years passed before he visited a village a second time.

The chief with the sacred sticks spread them on the ground and chanted the five sections. Everybody listened quietly during this solemn occasion, for they respected their ancestors and the *manitous* watching over them. Not until white men came did they have reason to doubt that the *Walam Olum* gave an honest picture of their life. Every creature in the story seemed as real to them as the animals they saw every day.

In their villages, the Delaware saw mainly birds. The tall pine, oak, maple, and elm trees around the sites cleared for living areas offered excellent nesting places. Here robins, thrushes, wrens, orioles, blue jays, cardinals, flickers, warblers, catbirds, titmice, and chickadees

lived, with little to fear from the humans. Turkeys did well to stay away, for they served the Delaware as food. Quail might run safely near a settlement in summer, but if hunting became difficult in winter, the Indians caught these birds in snares.

Two birds, the hawk and the owl, excited the Delaware more than other birds. The people saw the hawk as a great hunter and marveled at the way it dived upon its prey. To try to give an arrow greater accuracy and killing power, a hunter used hawk feathers on the end of the shaft. But the owl aroused superstitious fears, since it could fly at night when men had difficulty seeing. The Indians thought owls belonged to men and women who cast spells, and when a Delaware shot an owl, he believed he had caused the death of a human witch. Unlike the snake, the owl was not an evil spirit itself, but the Indians didn't want owls near their villages.

A village consisted of huts belonging to the married women. A woman shoved small poles into the ground to form a hut's rectangular framework. She tied other poles between the uprights to serve as supports for the roof and the walls, which were mats woven of reeds or grass. When a family moved, women and girls removed the mats and rolled them up to carry along to be the ceiling and sides of their next hut. The pole framework remained standing. It would be used again if the family returned to that site.

Inside her hut, an industrious woman built platforms of poles and mats around the sides. On these she kept favorite possessions, and the family used the platforms as seats and beds. Less ambitious people made grass or mat beds on the ground, perhaps covering them with animal skins for softness.

In the center of the hut burned a fire, which a good



housekeeper or her daughters never allowed to go out. If a fire did die, the person responsible had to go to a neighbor for hot coals to start it anew. Word quickly spread about that person's carelessness, and the neighbors often made jokes about her. A girl who let a fire go out might even have trouble getting a husband.

In the center or an open area of each village stood a building much larger than any other—perhaps fifty to a hundred feet in length and half as wide as it was long. It remained closed most of the year, but at least once a year a special celebration took place in it. Shortly before the festival period arrived, the women of the village cleaned around the building. At the same time, small family groups from nearby, who weren't really part of the settlement, camped on the outskirts of town in order to take part in the ceremonies. Some Indian tribes lived in large communities, but the Delaware preferred to scatter out. They had to come together, however, to take part in certain rituals.

During the ceremonies, men, women, and teen-agers wore their best clothes, often decorated with porcupine quills. Small children went naked, as usual. People of all ages wore strings of colorful shells through their pierced ears. Babies born since the celebration the year before received their names officially. Boys who had had visions while fasting in a lonely spot told or sang of their "omens." The Delaware believed a boy's dream foretold the course his life would take, and the explanation given to the vision by a medicine man deeply impressed the people. Girls received much less attention.

Interior of a Delaware ceremonial house in the early twentieth century. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

Girls and women cooked, tended the huts, made clothes, and raised children. They also spent many hours in the fields. The Delaware farmed around their settlements, and men gave a hand if tasks proved too heavy for the women. Clearing away trees could be a man's job, but usually men spent too much time away hunting, fishing, or trading to help with the crops.

Food-bearing trees, such as walnut, chestnut, hickory, wild cherry, and beach plum, might be left standing, but dogwood, sassafras, poplar, ash, and beech would be cut down or burned. The Delaware hollowed eating and cooking bowls and ladles out of maple and elm and with sharp fragments of flint scraped eating spoons out of laurel.

A good patch of blueberries or huckleberries might be spared, since the Delaware enjoyed fresh berries. They added dried berries when cooking their heavy bread made of pounded corn flour or their stews boiled in bear grease. Flowers—blue-fringed gentian, goldenrod—would not be spared, for a plant had to produce food or medicine to be beautiful to most Indians.

While clearing fields, the Indians saw many snakes—green snakes, garter snakes, king snakes, ring-necked snakes, and black racers. Quite common were pine snakes, often called bull snakes, since they are the eastern member of the bull-snake group. The common, or black, rat snake also lived where the Delaware had their villages, in New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania, Delaware, and southeastern New York. This reptile lived on wood rats, mice, ground squirrels, rabbits, and small birds found on or near the ground.

Perhaps the most unusual serpent seen by the Delaware was the hog-nosed snake. The scales at the end of its nose

turn up to form a tough little snout that helps it burrow in sandy areas or loose soil. It eats toads, which often sleep in the ground by day, and the snake roots them out with the aid of its odd nose. It appears dangerous to people who do not know its ways.

When approached, the hog nose puffs itself up with air and stretches its head to the sides by spreading ribs at the back of the head. Hissing loudly, it thrusts its head forward as if striking. But it is bluffing and almost never sinks its teeth into an enemy. If it fails to frighten the approaching animal, it suddenly thrashes about as if injured. Its tongue droops from its mouth, and in a moment it rolls onto its back to lie perfectly still as if dead. Left

The hog-nosed snakes seen by the Delaware resembled this one found farther west. (*Photo by Lloyd R. Ramelli, courtesy of United States Department of the Interior—Sport Fisheries & Wildlife*)



alone, it waits until danger has passed before it turns onto its belly and slips away in the underbrush.

The snakes the Delaware needed to watch for were timber, or banded, rattlers and copperheads. Timber rattlesnakes occurred in small numbers throughout the territory of the Indians. Copperheads could be found frequently; they were the most common poisonous reptiles in the eastern woodlands south of Canada. Their light-brown coloring is broken by uneven reddish-brown bands across their backs and down their sides. Hog-nosed snakes are yellowish brown, with somewhat banded tails, and, like copperheads, grow a foot and a half to three feet in length. The Delaware may have mistaken one for the other when failing to get a careful look at one moving through underbrush. Fortunately, a copperhead's poison lacks the strength of some snake venoms, and few Indians died when they were bitten.

Delaware clothing offered no protection from striking snakes. Only in winter, when reptiles would be asleep, did men wear moccasins or hip-high animal-skin leggings tied to the belts of their breechcloths. In warm weather, as they crept silently through forests and grasslands watching for moose, deer, bear, and rabbit, they wore just breechcloths. These were about four feet long, pulled between the legs and draped over a skin belt in front and back. The women wore wraparound skirts as they tended their crops. After burying fish for fertilizer, they would plant corn in rows, and beans or squash between the rows of corn. The skirts hung from their waists to just below their knees. In cold weather they added knee-high leggings, moccasins, and fur capes.

Since the Delaware fished regularly, they encountered many water snakes, all of them harmless. Glimpsing

spotted, slimy, dusky, and red-backed salamanders wriggling through the water, they may have thought these amphibians looked like baby water monsters. They also met musk, mud, spotted, and painted turtles, which they honored. Sometimes a snapping turtle, common in the eastern woodlands, clamped its bony beak on a toe or some other exposed spot when an Indian went fishing or swimming. It seems doubtful that the Delaware included the snapper in their reverence for turtles.

Patient, quick young people caught fish by hand, though in general a fisherman used a line and hook or a net. He made a line by rolling and twisting plant fibers together, and to this he fastened a hook carved from deer bone. Big catches called for nets woven from the fibers of milkweed, nettle, dogbane, or wild hemp plants.

When ocean fish ran up streams and rivers to lay their eggs in spring, the Delaware caught great quantities of alewives and shad. At other times, sturgeon, bass, and catfish served as food. To net fish, one man stood on shore holding a corner of the seine while two men rowed a dugout canoe out into the stream. After stretching the seine nearly to its limit, the men allowed the canoe to drift downstream a bit before they pulled back to land. One man jumped ashore with the net and began to haul it in. The man who had remained ashore upstream also pulled on his end of the net, and they swept the catch onto the beach. The third man remained in the canoe to keep the boat from floating away.

The Delaware Indians made a canoe from a single cedar log ten to twenty feet long. They first burned the section to be removed down the center of the log. Then, with stone axes and flint scrapers, they removed the charred wood. Several men working together fashioned a dug-

out. They gave it pointed ends so it moved easily through the water, but they provided no seats in it.

A man without other fishing equipment used a spear. He seldom shot his arrows at fish, for fear of losing them. Most men made their own bows and arrows, using a single piece of long, straight wood for the bow and each arrow. For big game, a man fitted an arrow with a tip of stone, but if the arrow was to be used for rabbits and turkeys, he would just whittle the wood itself to a point. The bowstring came from animal sinew, a strip of hide, or plant fibers, depending on what was at hand.

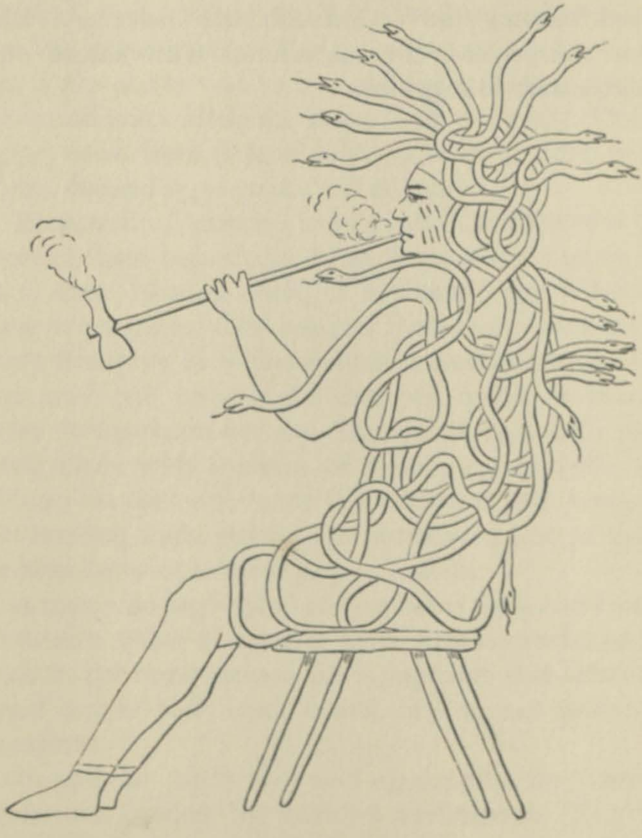
Because the Delaware lived at peace if allowed to do so, most of them lacked special equipment for warfare. They used their hunting tools, if necessary, for self-defense. Like other tribes, they painted their faces when going to meet strangers. Face decorations served as a form of writing, and one man could discover another's intentions from the marks on his face. The Delaware usually painted their faces with symbols of peace, using white stains. White was the opposite of the war color, red. A man kept his hunting tools nearby for protection, just in case the Indians he went to meet proved hostile.

A man who regularly brought home deer and bear won fame as a maker of hunting tools. Any man who had poor luck in the hunt blamed his equipment and went to the good hunter with corn, beans, and squash to trade for weapons.

In late fall, when they laid up supplies for winter, the Delaware hunted by burning underbrush. The flames drove game toward waiting marksmen. Most mammals and birds could keep ahead of the fire, but snakes and turtles escaped only if they reached water quickly or crawled into a deep den or other hole. Numerous box

turtles and wood turtles lost their lives, as they live on land rather than in or near water.

The Indians felt no sorrow for the snakes that died, and they had no time to mourn for turtles even though they regretted killing these reptiles that they respected. They believed burning the underbrush was necessary. Like Indians everywhere, they interfered with nature only when necessary to stay alive.



Atatarho, first president of the Iroquois Confederacy, who was supposedly protected by snakes. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

CHAPTER THREE

In New York and Southern Canada

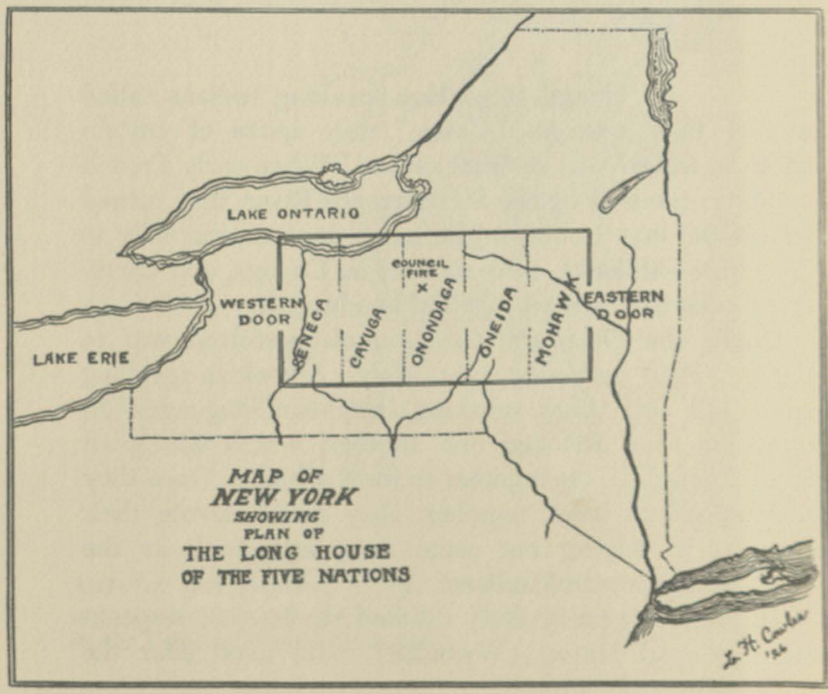
Though Algonkian-speaking Indians called any of their enemies "snakes," they spoke of certain tribes as *irinakhoiw,* or "real snakes." When early French explorers traveled up the St. Lawrence River, they turned *irinakhoiw* into Iroquois. The name applied originally to five tribes—Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Cayuga, and Onondaga—who had banded together in a league.

Unlike the Delaware, the Iroquois preferred war to peace. They attacked not only Algonkian-speaking tribes but also tribes speaking Iroquoian languages. At one time they attacked one another, which was what finally brought them together to form a league. Once they had agreed to work together, they could devote their energies to wiping out some neighbors, such as the Tobacco and Neutral Indians.

The Iroquois particularly disliked the Iroquoian-speaking Erie and Huron (Wyandot), who lived near the

Great Lakes. The Iroquois completely did away with the Erie, who may have numbered twelve thousand at one time. After killing all the men and many women, the Iroquois adopted the remaining women and most of the children into their tribes. Probably fewer than a thousand Huron, out of twenty thousand or more, escaped. No wonder many neighbors looked on the Iroquois as "real snakes," yet their league shows they were the most advanced Indians north of Mexico.

This diagram shows the relative location of the five Iroquois nations and graphically explains why the confederacy of tribes called itself "the long house." (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



According to legend, chiefs named Daganawida and Hiawatha developed the league idea. With a woman—Jikonsaseh—who carried weight among many tribes, they visited settlements to promote the idea. No one knows how many Iroquoian-speaking tribes received invitations to a great council or how many groups went.

The meeting took place on the shore of Lake Onondaga, in central New York. For several days chiefs argued for and against the league. In the end, five tribes accepted the idea. They agreed to "pull up" a giant tree, throw their tomahawks into its pit, and plant it again over the weapons. Tribes refusing to join left while the five sat around a tree chosen to symbolize peace. To make the agreement legal, they smoked pipefuls of tobacco, perhaps mixed with dogwood bark or dried sumac leaves.

Actually, they uprooted no tree and threw away no weapons. They would use their fighting tools against groups outside the league. The Iroquois fought with bows and arrows at a distance. At close range, braves depended on bone or stone knives and tomahawks. Originally, the tomahawk was a war club with which one Indian tried to bash out another's brains. It was about two feet long, with the striking end carved into a ball half a foot in diameter. After white men supplied hatchets, these became known as tomahawks.

The Iroquois knew the advantages of surprise attacks. They ambushed enemies along trails in the forests or suddenly rushed from a grove of trees to destroy a village. Reports say the Iroquois tortured adult male captives when time permitted, living up to their name of "real snakes." They sometimes adopted children of their enemies.

Partly because they were centrally located and had a



A Milwaukee Museum group represents a council at the formation of the League of the Iroquois. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

large population, the Onandaga became leaders of the league. The Mohawk had the responsibility of watching for enemies from the east; the Seneca guarded the Iroquois territory on the west. The Cayuga and Oneida, with small populations, looked after captives.

Problems arising within a tribe usually were settled within that tribe. Only if they proved too difficult for the local chiefs to handle could they be brought before the league council. This left the council chiefs free to deal with matters of concern to all five groups. As a result, the league council dealt mainly with affairs of war, treaties of peace, and, after the arrival of white men, the fur trade and the sale of land.

Fifty chiefs made up the council, and every one of them had to agree on a course of action before it could be taken.



Since they all had nearly the same goals, they were of one mind much of the time. Certain families in each tribe received the honor of naming a league chief. And although the chiefs were men, it was the women of the families who chose them. Among the Iroquois and many other tribes, the family line was reckoned through the mothers rather than through the fathers.

Other chiefs besides the fifty took part in meetings when they had something to contribute. These were not picked by women. They usually had won fame in battle and offered advice when the possibility of war came up for debate. No other Indians in Canada or the United States had a governing body to compare with the council.

In some ways, the Iroquois were similar to other eastern woodlands Indians. Much of their dress resembled that of the Delaware, though they wore moccasins in summer as well as in winter. These moccasins, higher than those of the Delaware, reached above the ankle and were fastened on with deerskin thongs. At one time, the Iroquois wove

moccasins of corn husks, but animal skins proved better. On the warpath, a brave might change his breechcloth for a short skirtlike garment, or kilt. He felt the kilt gave him more freedom of movement, and he might even take it off when he went into battle.

As fall weather arrived and fighting became less frequent, the brave might add a shirt. This had sleeves somewhat like the sleeves of ordinary shirts. Anthropologists think people who migrated from Asia to the New World after the birth of Christ brought a knowledge of making shirts with them.

Women had wraparound skirts, and both men and women wore fur robes during winter. Men also put on fur hats, some resembling coonskin caps, in cold weather. Other hats were the heads of wolves, wildcats, or bears, with the nose, eyes, and ears left in place. An Indian thought such a headdress gave him the characteristics of the animal. Children put on clothing for the first time when they approached their teens.

Women made the clothes, mainly from skins of deer, elk, and moose. Dyed porcupine quills and moose hair sewn on garments added decoration. The dyes for these ornaments came from boiled plant juices or from minerals pounded fine and mixed with bear fat.

The Iroquois gave careful attention to their hair. Women wore their hair long, either in a knot at the neck or tied to hang loose in a ponytail. They greased it with bear fat to make it shine; men greased their hair also. Warriors and chiefs pulled out the hair from the sides of their heads and left only a ridge on top, from above the forehead back to the neck. They trimmed the top short but let the back hair grow long, in a scalp lock.

One Indian scalped another by grasping the long hair at the neck and slicing off the skin that held the hair.

Sometimes a man lived after being scalped, but not often. By the time he had been subdued to the point where his scalp could be taken, he usually had other severe injuries as well. For all their fierceness, the Iroquois claimed to have scalped few victims before white men came. When the whites warred against various tribes, they wanted evidence that enemies had been killed. They rewarded Indians who brought in scalps, for these proved someone had probably died.

The Delaware built houses in open places, but the Iroquois often lived among trees, usually near a lake or river. Trees, of course, hid enemies approaching a village, so the Iroquois cleared an area and dug a wide ditch around their settlements. Inside the ditch they built a wall of upright logs with sharpened ends, and behind these palisades and ditches they felt secure.

Building their settlements in groves of maple, hemlock, birch, ash, oak, or elm, they often came upon snakes. Like the Delaware, the Iroquois saw these reptiles, especially timber rattlers, as representatives of evil.

According to Iroquois beliefs, the world once existed without evil. The earth consisted of water, in which lived beavers, muskrats, loons, ducks, and similar animals. A creative spirit occupied a region above the earth known as the Land of Happy Spirits, which white men came to call the Happy Hunting Ground. One day the creative spirit pulled up a tree and looked down through the hole this left to discover the world below. Calling his sister, he sent her down to become the mother of earth. As she floated down, the water animals saw her and tried to dig mud from the bottom of the water to make land for her. The first ones died in the attempt, but one finally succeeded. He spread the mud on a turtle's back and made land on which the woman could live.

After her arrival on earth, the woman gave birth to twins. The first boy was good, but the second was bad and caused his mother to die while he was being born. The good spirit made the sun of their mother's head. To offset this, the bad one created night, but the good one undid part of the damage by using their mother's body to make the moon and stars. The good twin created bear and deer, but the bad spirit tried to undo his work by making poisonous snakes. Thus timber and massasauga rattlesnakes came into existence, and these were the two dangerous snakes the Iroquois Indians had to watch for in southern Quebec and Ontario and in New York.

At last the good twin challenged his brother to a fight. Armed with giant thorns, they slashed and stabbed at each other until the good one drove the evil twin under the earth into a land of darkness. And although he couldn't return to earth, the bad one sent up wicked thoughts. Whenever one of these entered the mind of an animal, trouble resulted. After men came to earth, the evil ideas slipped into their minds and caused even more trouble.

In the beginning, according to Iroquois legends, their ancestors lived in the Land of Happy Spirits with the creative spirit. They played and frolicked all day, growing lazy and flabby. In addition, they made a terrible racket at their games and kept the spirit awake. Something had to be done.

Putting the people in a basket, the spirit took them to earth. Here they would meet evil spirits and know hardships. When the hardships toughened them and they proved smarter and braver than the evil spirits, he promised to lead them back to the Land of Happy Spirits. Among the evil spirits they would meet were rattlesnakes.



Leaves and berries of the mountain ash. (*Photo courtesy of United States Department of Agriculture*)

The Iroquois used plants for medicines. The ash tree served in treating snakebite, though it probably saved few men from the venom of a full-grown timber rattler. When an Indian was bitten by a snake, he looked for an ash or sent a close friend to find one. Having located the tree with its oval leaves and heavily ridged, ashy-colored bark, the Indian repeated a formula taught him by a sachem, or medicine man. He apologized for wounding the tree and asked for its help in curing the bite of the "forked tongue, whose bite is like the sting of evil arrows."

Only after saying the proper chant did he cut bark or leaves in an attempt to cure the bite. He squeezed the juice from the leaves into the fang wounds and bound a

wad of crushed leaves over the bite to draw out the venom. If he could start a fire and had anything at hand in which to cook, he boiled the bark to make a drink. Unlike tribes who avoided killing snakes, the Iroquois made arrows of ash especially for shooting the reptiles.

Belief in the medicinal powers of the ash grew out of an Iroquois legend. According to this tale, a man, his wife, and two children sat by the fire in their wigwam, which was probably the Iroquoian home long before Columbus reached the New World. Unnoticed, a rattler crawled in and struck the woman and two children before the man could kill it. The man had no medicine, and nothing he did could save his wife and children. Heartbroken and without a desire to go on living, he asked a spirit to turn him into a tree that would serve other Indians if they were bitten. The spirit turned him into an ash tree. Any Iroquois sleeping in the forest spread ash leaves around the spot where he lay. He expected this circle to keep snakes away.

Besides rattlers, the Iroquois saw king snakes, garter snakes, black racers, hog-nosed snakes, green snakes, and water snakes. The Indians particularly disliked those with reddish markings, such as red-bellied, fox, and ring-necked snakes. To most Indian tribes, a reddish color signified war. A brave painted red on his face and body when he went into battle, and an Iroquois chief sent a belt of reddish-purple wampum (shells) to an enemy tribe to announce the start of hostilities.

The Iroquois also feared snakes that gave off bad odors, such as rat snakes. Because rat snakes move swiftly and bite more frequently than many other harmless snakes, the Indians considered them dangerous.

No matter how he suffered from snakebite or any other cause, the Iroquois tried to keep from showing it. Since

evil spirits supposedly caused pain, he could be sure good spirits were working to help him. It would be improper for a man to whine when his friends, the good spirits, were trying to relieve his suffering. Besides, if he kept his face and body calm, the bad spirits might never know they had brought him discomfort.

Keeping a calm face extended to other matters as well. From the time they started to walk and could go to see what other people were doing, Iroquois children were taught not to show curiosity. The Iroquois said any man who let curiosity get the better of him would miss his mark whenever he shot an arrow. The curious woman would find half-developed or wormy ears of corn on her plants. As with the Delaware, the Iroquois women tended the fields because the men kept busy in other ways.

After a man proved he could face hardships and outsmart evil spirits, the Iroquois expected the creative spirit to take him back to the Land of Happy Spirits. For this reason, a man often looked forward to death without fear.

According to various Indian groups, in the Land of Happy Spirits a man continued to live much as he had on earth. He still hunted deer, elk, moose, bear, fox, woodchuck, otter, muskrat, rabbit, turkey, ruffed grouse, and pheasant. Unlike on earth, however, every arrow he shot would bring down a delicious buck or whatever else he desired. Any time a man in the Land of Happy Spirits fished—with hook, net, or trap—he would catch all the sturgeon, yellow perch, bass, or brook trout he wanted. If he sought berries, bushes covered with the ones he liked would be near. Before the coming of white men, the Land of Happy Spirits may have sounded less like a heaven, but it is now difficult to know which additions to old beliefs came later.

Birds would sing beautiful songs in the oak and elm



"The Spirit of the Animals Protecting Deer from Hunters," a watercolor painted by Tom (Two Arrows) Dorsey in 1946. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

trees close by. These creatures would resemble the robins, thrushes, bluebirds, orioles, sparrows, and wrens known on earth, only they would be more colorful. Even sparrow hawks and screech owls would wear bright colors and sing lovely melodies. If there were ash trees, they were only to give the Indian shade, for he had no need of snakebite medicine after he left earth.

Unless a man's wife behaved very badly on earth, she joined him in the Land of Happy Spirits. The Iroquois talked mainly of how men lived in the next world, but it is safe to assume that women found the land easy to farm. Their pointed sticks and their hoes made of turtle shells or the wide, flat bones of deer always remained sharp. Every corn, squash, bean, or sunflower seed they planted grew quickly into a large, productive plant. A woman wouldn't need to till large fields, as she did on earth, because the Happy Hunting Ground was very fertile. Of the eastern woodlands Indians, the Iroquois had the largest fields, sometimes three hundred acres around a village.

What happened to the man who lived a bad life on earth? He, too, went to the Land of Happy Spirits. But his life there was full of sorrow. Every arrow he shot missed its mark. If he fished, he tripped and fell in the water, frightening even the catfish away. Going in search of berries, he lost the trail and wandered alone and hungry up steep hills that exhausted him. Now and again he might see a field of squash, but as he stopped to snatch the fruit off the vine, his hand closed on empty air.

In time his path would cross that of a good man. The good man would take him home, and his wife would cook them a big meal. The bad man would eat, but would feel even worse than before because he had been forced to depend on the goodness of someone else.

A man recited chants to help get himself to the Land of Happy Spirits, but the Iroquois had no set religion to follow in arriving there. It is doubtful that two men shared exactly the same religious beliefs. Every Iroquois added his own thoughts to the general beliefs of the tribe and those handed down to him by his family. He told these to his children, who added thoughts of their own.

All the Iroquois agreed on the creative spirit, and most believed that on sunny days he was pleased with them. On hazy or showery days they continued in his good graces, but when a severe storm hit, they felt they had displeased him. The spirit did not cause the storm. Evil spirits were responsible, but because of his displeasure the creative spirit allowed bad spirits to darken the sky with lashing rains or heavy snows.

Most Iroquois thought they had to please the bad spirits. And since the good spirits were helping fight the bad ones, the Indians tried to please the good ones also. Half a dozen times a year they had meetings to help keep the spirits happy. These came as close to church services as anything the Iroquois did.

The first important gathering of the year took place in spring, when the sap began to rise in the trees. The Iroquois collected maple sap to sweeten their food, so they paid close attention to the arrival of this time of year. At the start of this meeting, the men thanked the creative spirit for chasing away the worst storms of winter and for letting life return to the maples. After giving thanks, they supposedly admitted to wrongs they had done.

One of the oldest sachems, or chiefs, started by holding a string of wampum in his hand while reciting his evil deeds. When he had finished, he handed the shells to another man, who had to confess his mistakes. And so the

wampum passed from hand to hand while the men admitted to neglecting old people, widows, or orphans. If they had broken promises, acted cowardly, or molested good women, they were supposed to tell this. They had done wrong if they had killed any man other than an enemy with whom their tribe was at war.

A hunter was expected to admit it if he had shot more animals than his family needed for food and clothing. By restricting a man to hunting only as much as he needed, the wise Iroquois conserved the creatures of the woods around their settlements.

If a man admitted his errors, the other men probably forgave him. But if he failed to confess something of which his companions knew, he would be punished. This punishment was mental rather than physical. The other men treated him as if he didn't exist, or else they made fun of him. He was considered outside the group thereafter; since Iroquois life centered around tribal activities, it was difficult for a man to live by himself. Often such an outcast would kill himself. The Iroquois considered suicide a brave act, so they then forgave him the wrongs he had done.

The next important gathering celebrated planting time. The Iroquois came together when trees and bushes budded out and the earliest flowers sprouted. At this time the earth usually seemed warm enough to allow seeds to be planted. Again the Indians gave thanks, this time because the creative spirit was making planting possible.

When the first shoots of corn appeared above ground, another celebration took place. The Indians said thanks because life had been given to the dead seeds and expressed their hope that the plants would be allowed to produce well. During the celebration they burned to-

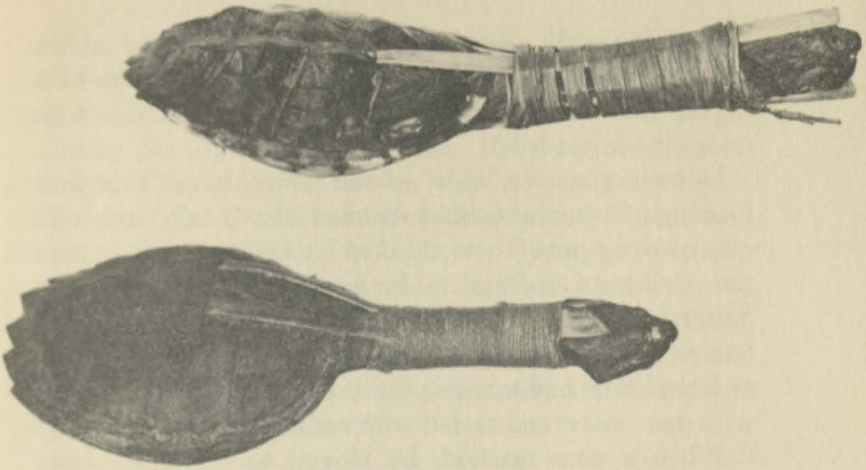
bacco, believing that their hopes would ascend to the Land of Happy Spirits with the rising smoke. Another celebration came when the first soft ears of corn could be boiled and eaten. At the same time, a leading sachem asked the good spirits to protect them from dangers. In fall, as flint corn reached maturity, the Iroquois held a harvest celebration.

One other big event occurred in winter, usually after a blizzard. The Iroquois believed that bad storms drove evil spirits into houses. They held the winter ceremony to get the evil ones out of their homes.

A sachem led or dragged a gray fox (sometimes a white dog) through his village. He took the animal into each house, and in each he enacted a special ceremony to get the bad spirits to enter the fox's body. After the last house had been visited, the sachem tied the animal's jaws shut to hold the evil spirits in. At last he strangled the fox, and its body, holding the spirits, was burned.

Celebrations involved dances and chants, for which men dressed specially. Around their knees they tied rattles made of deer hooves. A council chief might put on a cap or head band holding deer antlers so they curved up over his head. The Iroquois often wore arm bands of wampum or fur during ceremonial dances. For war dances they added face and body paint, and a warrior might put on a necklace of animal teeth or claws. Anything he wore other than wampum and paints came from animals he had killed himself.

Wampum reached the Iroquois through trade with Algonkian-speaking Indians from the coast. According to Iroquois tales, however, Hiawatha and Daganawida produced the first wampum when they brought the Mohawk, Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, and Cayuga together in the



Seneca turtle-shell rattles used in celebrations. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

league. Before they had wampum, the Iroquois used porcupine quills or eagle feathers for special belts and decorations.

In the legend of the ash tree, the rattlesnake crawled into a wigwam. In quite early times, the Iroquois may have lived in such stick-and-thatch huts, but by the time white men arrived, the five tribes were occupying large houses. They called themselves People of the Longhouse because of these dwellings. One of these buildings might be fifty to a hundred fifty feet long, twenty to thirty feet wide, and fifteen to twenty-five feet high. The framework of poles held a cover of birchbark, though other barks could be used if no birches were available.

An open area ran down the length of the house, and on either side of it faced many cubicles, which afforded a degree of privacy. Families lived in these cubicles and also stored most of their belongings in them. A ledge of bark

around the walls of a "room" stood about a foot above the floor and provided sitting and sleeping places. A higher shelf offered storage space for objects not kept under the lower ledge.

Down the center "aisle" of the house, wives kept fires burning. Over these, they cooked the family meals in clay cooking pots. These differed from the cooking jars of the Delaware Indians in having rounded rather than pointed bottoms. The Iroquois fashioned spoons, bowls, barrels, and even some cooking pots out of bark. In a bowl or barrel that had a seam, the sides were sewed together with deer sinew and sealed with resin of spruce trees.

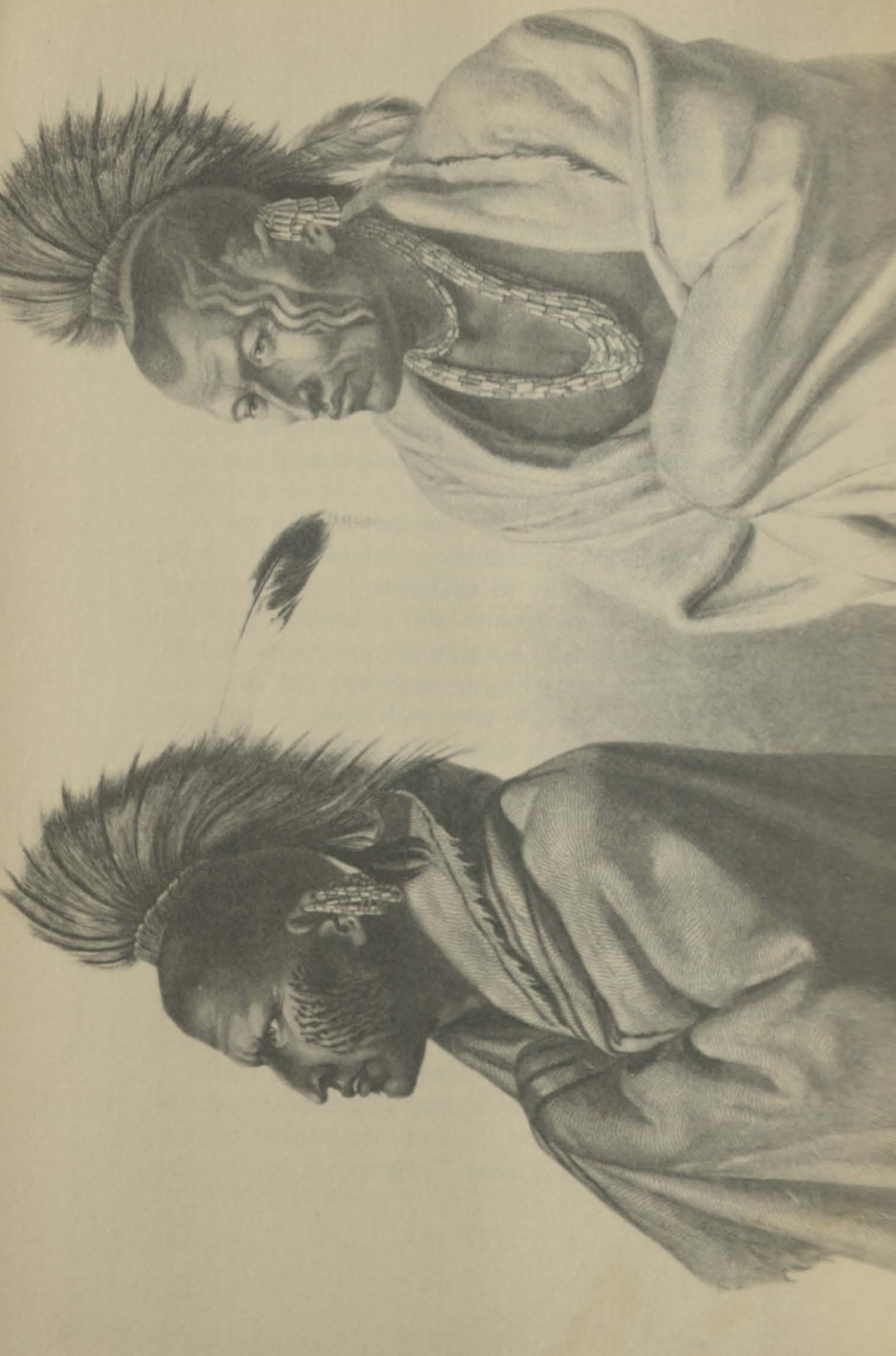
When a man married, he moved to his wife's longhouse. He remained a member of his own clan, but his children became members of the mother's clan. If the husband wanted to take more than one wife, he had to choose them from the clan and the longhouse of his first wife. His wife's brothers carried more weight in the family than he did, since they were of her clan, and his children might mind these uncles better than they minded him.

If a man wanted to get along well in his wife's longhouse, he tried to distinguish himself in battle. He worked hard to create good fighting and hunting equipment and to build a sturdy, swift canoe. The Iroquois made elm or spruce canoes. Over ribs of cedar they fastened the bark, sewing the seams together with plant fibers or deer sinew and sealing them with spruce gum. One man could build a canoe for two people, but several men worked together on the vessels that held up to twenty persons.

When white men came to North America, they found canoes to be highly satisfactory for traveling. Not content to borrow the Indian's boat, they also wanted his land. They drove the Tuscarora Indians out of North

Carolina, after which this tribe came north and joined the Iroquois league, so it is sometimes known as the Six Nations instead of the Five Nations.

During the American Revolution, the Iroquois league split apart. The Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga tribes chose the British side; the Oneida and Tuscarora fought with the Americans. Later, the Iroquois resisted being driven to the Midwest and Southwest, and numbers of them still live in southern Canada and in New York. They have adapted themselves to the ways of their white neighbors, and no one now looks on them as "real snakes."



CHAPTER FOUR

South of Lake Superior

Most Algonkian-speaking tribes had a way of life somewhat like that of the Delaware Indians, yet many differences existed between the various groups. Although the Fox Indians called the Delaware "grandfather," they didn't follow the Delaware in looking on snakes as evil spirits. Rather, the Fox believed a snake could bring good luck.

A young man wanting a long life and success in battle might go in search of a snake. Finding one, he would burn tobacco in its vicinity, blow the smoke in its direction, and chant his wishes. He would ask the *manitou*—for he looked on the reptile as a spirit—to give him good health and the necessities of life. An Indian of the Fox tribe never knowingly killed a snake, and would treat even a dead snake with reverence, laying tobacco near its head for its use in the next life.

Sauk Indian (*left*), and Fox. (*Photo courtesy of American Museum of Natural History*)

The Fox Indians lived in Wisconsin south of Lake Superior. The tribe had several clans, all of which had animal names, such as Fox. Finding it difficult to pronounce the Indian names, early white explorers probably called the clans by the name of the one group. So the whole tribe came to be known as the Fox.

The Indians called themselves something that sounded like Musquakie, meaning "red earth." Perhaps they once lived in a region where the land had a reddish color, but many anthropologists today have a different theory. They say the early Fox Indians believed they had been created out of red clay by one of the spirits in which they believed. White men later wrote this spirit's name as Geechee Manito-ah.

According to the Fox, Geechee Manito-ah had a body filled with fire. He had to handle objects with care to keep from scorching them and was awkward in his first effort to create an animal. He produced one that was round and flat, with scrawny legs wide at its sides. Except for its soft fur it looked ugly to the spirit, who called it Turtle and set it aside in disgust.

Molding more clay gently, he produced Fox, with a beautiful reddish fur, and Raccoon, also with a handsome coat. Pleased with these animals, he breathed on them to give them life, but his hot breath carried to Turtle and gave it the power to move as well. Unfortunately, he didn't stop in time. His hot breath set fire to plants, and in a moment the whole world was ablaze.

After the fire, Geechee Manito-ah looked sadly about the ash-covered earth. To his surprise, something moved near his feet. Out of the ashes crawled Turtle, whose fur had been burned away. Its back had been baked to a hard shell, into which it had pulled its head, legs, and tail to

escape the fire. From then on Geechee Manito-ah admired Turtle. And feeling cheered up, the spirit began the work of creation over again, this time breathing life into his animals gently.

Geechee Manito-ah didn't create a snake. The first one came into the world by accident. As he worked, Geechee Manito-ah became annoyed with a part of his body that hung in his way and served no purpose. He ripped it off and threw it into the bushes, where it immediately came to life and glided off, hissing. After it climbed a high hill, it found a cave and hid inside. Life in the cave proved lonely, so it took a dead tree branch as its wife, and all the snakes of the world are their children.

From time to time, the Fox believed, the original snake stuck its head out of the cave. It sucked in its breath, drawing moisture from the air until there was none left to fall to the ground. Pools and streams began to dry up. If the snake kept its head out too long, a great drought scorched the land. But when it tired of lying in the open, it would retreat into its cave, and then rain would come. If the snake slept too long, there would be floods. The Fox called it Wau-kau-thee, the Rain Serpent.

After completing the second creation, Geechee Manito-ah sailed into the sky in a large bowl. Each day he floated overhead to inspect his handiwork, for he was the sun. If he angered Wau-kau-thee, the Rain Serpent belched up dark clouds to cut off his view. Geechee Manito-ah only smiled, remembering how Wau-kau-thee once saved the world.

It happened when Geechee Manito-ah came down from the sky to make arrows. Rabbit, another strong spirit, stole some of the weapons and shot Geechee Manito-ah. Fire poured from the wounds and would have

burned up the world, but Wau-kau-thee spit water on the flames. Even after the fire was out, he went on spitting until a tremendous flood resulted. Almost every Indian tribe has a flood legend.

Partridge, antelope, muskrat, and a few other animals saved Geechee Manito-ah. After he recovered and got back in the sky, he dried up much of the water. The Fox say he didn't dry up enough. They looked on Lakes Michigan and Superior as unnecessarily large bodies of water.

Some other groups of Indians around the Great Lakes believed much as the Fox did. A few of these tribes were closely related to the Fox and may not have been separate groups. The name of the A-saw-we-kee meant "yellow earth," so it seems likely they and the Fox were originally two branches of one tribe. White men shortened A-saw-we-kee to Sauk, or Sac. These Indians moved farther north and east than the Fox for a time, but stronger tribes in Canada pushed the Sauk back. Very much like the Fox and Sauk but living farther south and east, the Kickapoo Indians may have been an offshoot of the Fox.

The Shawnee, in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky, once belonged to the Fox-Sauk tribes. We can't be sure if it is history or just legend, but supposedly the Shawnee broke away because of a bear's foot. The Fox and Sauk Indians liked to feast at every opportunity. At special times of the year, feasts carried religious meaning and included all members of the tribes. Many animals furnished the meat, and the feet of bears were looked on as special treats, to be eaten only by leading chiefs.

At one feast, a minor chief grabbed a bear's foot for himself, bringing on a quarrel. He wouldn't give the foot

back, but finally called his closest relatives together and walked out. The independent nation he set up became the Shawnee, which means "southern." These Great Lakes Indians had darker skins than the Delaware, who were not much darker than southern Europeans.

The Iowa Indians, found mainly across the Mississippi River in Iowa, probably had no close blood ties with the Fox and Sauk. They had treaty ties, however, which may have grown out of mutual dislike. The Fox, it has been reported, didn't trust the Iowa, who had a reputation for being sneaky and dangerous. So the Fox, noted for hon-



Fox boys in costume. *(Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation)*

esty in spite of their warlike nature, found it safer to be the allies than the enemies of the Iowa. The Iowa spoke a language similar to that of the Sioux Indians rather than an Algonkian tongue.

Family life among the Fox Indians was in many ways similar to life among the Delaware. Men hunted while women farmed and raised children. Girls remained under their mothers' guidance from the time they came into the world until they married, and boys spent the first six or seven years of their lives entirely in their mothers' care.

If a child misbehaved, his mother blacked his face with ashes and shoved him outside the lodge for the neighbors to see. He remained there, with nothing to eat, until his mother decided he had been punished enough. Girls might be punished until they reached their early teens, but boys escaped after about seven years.

When he became six or seven, the Fox boy received more attention from the men of his clan than previously. Men too old to do much hunting or fighting made him a small bow and short arrows, not as toys but as real weapons. With these he began hunting, shooting at the birds near his village. Men taught youngsters how to shoot by lecturing them during winter evenings, when all the family was together and storytelling instruction helped pass the time.

During the first spring he had a bow and arrows, the boy continued to go with his mother or an older sister to look for huckleberries, blueberries, Juneberries, raspberries, or gooseberries. But he gave little help with picking fruit, for he saw himself as better than the womenfolk and on his way to becoming a great hunter. Wrens, titmice, and sparrows were not too small for him to shoot. He also tried his skill on robins, blackbirds, cardinals, woodpeckers, and flickers.

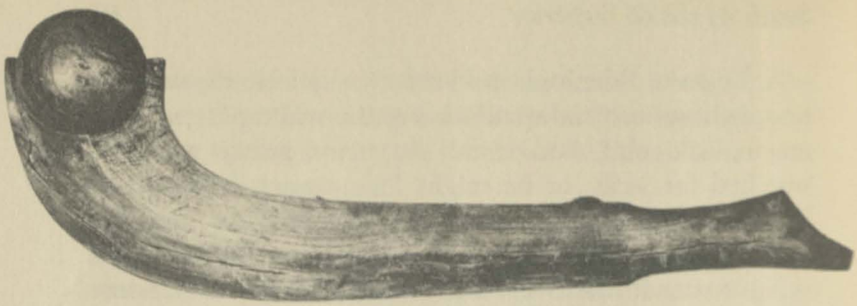
As he grew older and could roam away from the women, he sought grouse and quail among the white pine, spruce, maple, oak, elm, and cedar. In more grassy areas he watched for larks, or he might hide among birches and hemlocks to wait for ducks and geese to come near the shore of a lake or stream.

No matter if it was a small warbler, the boy took home the first game he had killed and presented it proudly to his family. This called for a celebration. One bird provided little meat, of course, but the mother would add to it whatever the father or other family members had shot and would cook it in a stew with corn, beans, and arrowroot tubers. If the family had had good hunting, they invited other relatives and close friends, and the Indians ate enough to have kept them fed for several days. Although they knew periods of poor hunting and of hunger, they always seized eagerly on any opportunity for a feast.

With his small weapons, a Fox boy shot at bullfrogs, leopard frogs, tree frogs, wood frogs, or American toads, and perhaps at soft-shelled turtles. It did him little good to shoot at the hard-shelled wood turtles, Blanding turtles, painted turtles, or snappers. Skinks, eastern newts, spotted salamanders, and red-backed salamanders may have looked enough like snakes that he left them alone.

At about age ten he received a full-sized bow, which was accurate at a range up to about a hundred feet. He now looked on himself as a real hunter. Birds, frogs, and turtles had less to fear from him as he searched for rabbits, squirrels, badgers, woodchucks, and opossums. Again, the first of these he killed went into a pot with meat brought home by other members of the family to provide a feast.

When he had proved himself capable of hunting small, slow, or somewhat tame animals, an older man took him



A war club, two feet long, of the type used by the Fox and Sauk. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

to hunt big, cunning, and swift creatures. By this time he might be twelve and would consider himself a match for any white-tailed deer, elk, lynx, fox, raccoon, marten, fisher, muskrat, or beaver. He probably was afraid of buffalo, wolves, wildcats, and black bears, but he would try not to show it. He was also taught how to set snares.

When he reached the age of fourteen or fifteen, the young man was ready to go with the hunters to seek buffalo. Before white men came to the New World, some buffalo could be found in the forests and grassy regions east of the Mississippi River.

Now he was old enough to think of getting married. If he regularly brought home deer, elk, bear, and other important game animals, he found it easy to attract a wife. The young man considered the girls in nearby lodges as long as they weren't of his clan. He looked for a girl who kept busy. Knowing this, mothers of teen-age girls tried to find an endless succession of tasks for their daughters to perform.

The girl who worked hard and steadily in the fields, at her sewing, or in gathering reeds and crab apples might have a chance to marry when she was thirteen or four-

teen. Undoubtedly she could marry at fifteen or sixteen, while the lazy girl might find herself without a husband until she was seventeen or eighteen. The industrious one would often become a man's first wife; an easy-going girl might be a second or third wife. A man of the Fox tribe could have several wives at once.

When a young man of fifteen to twenty years of age found a girl he wanted, he looked for a brother or uncle of hers with whom to become friendly. After the two men became friends, the young man expressed an interest in the girl and said he would serve her parents if he could have her as a wife. The friend carried the message to the parents. If they agreed, the young man moved into their lodge and from then on the girl belonged to him.

The young man hunted for the girl's parents, whom he had agreed to serve. They could treat him as a servant, but if he was a good provider, they usually treated him well. As soon as a baby was born to the girl, the man's period of serving ended and the young couple usually set up a house of their own.

Besides marrying and raising a family, the teen-ager looked forward to going to war. In battle, the Fox thought, he proved what a great man he was. He first fought under the leadership of another brave, but as soon as he had wounded or killed an enemy, he could paint his face and wear feathers in his hair. Young men dreamed of heading war parties themselves, and whether a warrior became a war chief depended on his conduct in his first fights. If he fought bravely and well, other warriors would later willingly follow him into battle.

The Fox brave who wanted to lead a war party found a lonely place in which to fast and wait for an omen. At this time he paid close attention to any snakes he met, for he thought they were signs sent to guide him. Often he

saw green snakes, blue racers, fox snakes, king snakes, hog-nosed snakes, and water snakes. He might come upon a garter snake or a ring-necked snake, which pleased him because he looked on them as messengers.

In one Fox legend, some animals wanting to spy on a spirit sent a snake to do the job for them. The spirit discovered the snake. To let the other animals know he was aware of what they were doing, the spirit tied a ring of fat around the snake's neck and sent it back. Some Indians thought this created the ring-necked snake. Others said the fat left streaks along the snake's body as it crawled and produced the garter snake. A Fox Indian who found a garter snake or a ringneck thought he had a sure omen that a spirit watched over him.

The most dangerous snake the brave could find was the massasauga rattler, a gray or brownish reptile covered with dark-brown to black splotches. The Indian would burn tobacco as near it as possible and ask for its powers to kill enemies. Unless cornered, the snake probably crawled away. Otherwise it would pull its two-to-three-foot length into a coil with its head and tail near the center. By shaking its tail it made a rattling sound, like dry leaves or twigs knocking together, thus warning its enemies to stay away.

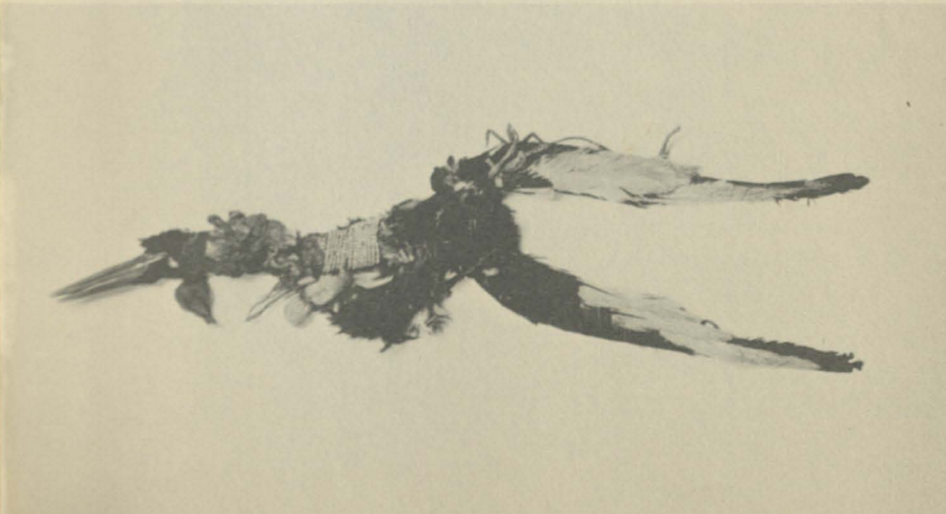
If it opened its mouth to strike, two long, curved fangs dropped down from the roof of its mouth. These were hollow, and the snake's venom flowed down through them if it bit anything. The Indian brave knew he had to keep his distance. The venom might not kill him (the massasauga produces less poison than the timber rattler), but it would make him ill. If a rattler did strike him, he thought a bad spirit wanted to punish him for some misdeed.

During his period of fast, the brave would have dreams and hallucinations, or imaginary visions. He took these to be signs from the spirits and guessed at their special meanings. If they seemed unfavorable, he gave up the idea of leading a war party at that time. But he probably did his best to interpret them in a favorable way.

Returning to his village, he prepared a feast, painted his face, and told his visions to the braves who came to eat with him. Since the Fox looked for excuses to fight, he soon gathered a following—provided he had been a good warrior in previous battles and his signs had impressed the others. Warriors ranged in age from about fifteen to forty-five. Fighting took place in summer. In warm weather, Fox clans lived in larger groups than in winter, so more braves could be gathered together. Besides, conditions for fighting were better.

In late fall, villages broke up and family groups moved to winter hunting grounds. Civilian chiefs told each family where it should spend the winter. The Fox paid less

A bird-skin headdress from the war bundle of a Sauk or Fox. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



attention to peacetime chiefs than to wartime leaders, but generally they obeyed in going to the winter ranges.

In traveling between winter and summer territories, the Fox warriors went on foot, and the women, young people, and old men journeyed in canoes. These craft, burned and hollowed out of butternut logs, resembled the dugouts of the Delaware Indians. However, a few Fox and Sauk Indians copied birchbark canoes from their Huron and Ojibway neighbors, and occasionally they covered frames of springy wood with skins to make boats.

During the summer women, girls, and old men gathered reeds from pools and streams. These the women wove into mats to cover the winter wigwams. Summer lodges were fifty feet long and fifteen to twenty feet wide, made of poles covered with bark. When a family reached its winter territory, it drove two rows of small poles into the

The type of house used by the Fox in winter. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



ground. The rows were about ten feet apart and ten to fifteen feet long. After pulling the tops of the poles together to be tied, the family covered them with the reed mats woven in summer. Animal skins might also serve as cover.

When animals abounded, the Indians lived well, but in bad winters some starved. They took little food with them from the summer villages. Extra grain left at the end of summer they buried at their summer lodges for use as seed and food when they returned in the spring.

Though they lived near rivers, they ate fish, such as catfish, whitefish, perch, pike, trout, and bass, only when hunger forced them to it. Fishing fell to the women, as men considered it beneath them. In winter, when they most often lacked food, fish were safe, for the Fox seldom fished through the ice. Instead, men continued to hunt, wearing snowshoes of hide strips tied across loops of ash.

Every wife had a large clay cooking pot. She started her "stew" before going to sleep at night, and from time to time woke up to add fuel to the fire. By morning the food was done, at which time the family ate its big meal of the day. For the rest of the day no one ate a regular meal, but anyone who was hungry went to the pot and dipped up leftovers in his personal bowl. Eating bowls were fashioned from bark, wood, bone, horn, shell, skin, or even stone.

Although the Fox and Sauk Indians devoted much time to hunting, farming, and fighting, they also enjoyed rugged sports. A ball game they played, as did the Iroquois and several other tribes, almost took the place of war, it was so rough. Each player had a racket made of a short stick with a small net attached to one end. Using a ball made of skin strips or plant fibers wrapped into a

lump, the Fox played on any open area large enough to provide running space. The object was to bat, roll, or drive the ball to one end or the other of the field. Each team consisted of however many players were available at the time, whether a few or dozens.

The team on which a man played was decided at the time of his birth. Every Fox clan had two groups of men. At the birth of his first son, a father announced that that son would be in the first group. His second son automatically belonged to the second group, his third son to the first, and so on. As a result, each clan always had two groups of men for any occasion.

In a ball game players bashed one another over the head, tripped one another, and displayed as much viciousness as cunning. Perhaps a man killed another on the playing field. No matter, even if he did it on purpose. As punishment, his tribesmen expected him to give the dead man's family some presents. He might marry the man's widow so she would have someone to look after her.

When white men arrived, they found the Indian game exciting, and they learned to play it. They drew up rules, limited the number of players on a team, and cut down on the roughness. The Fox Indians followed their Canadian neighbors in calling the game *bagataway*, but Frenchmen named it *la crosse* since the racket looked somewhat like a bishop's crosier, or crooked staff. Today it is known as lacrosse the world over.

In time, the Fox and Sauk turned from playing games with the whites to fighting them, but with little success. They had to smoke the peace pipe with the overpowering intruders. Because of their pipes, the Fox and Sauk were called People of the Peace Pipe and People of the Calumet. *Calumet* was a French term, taken from the Latin

for "reed," because the Indians' stone-bowled pipe was smoked through hollow reed stems. These pipes of soft red stone were used only on ceremonial occasions—perhaps at a declaration of war or on agreeing to a peace.



CHAPTER FIVE

Along the Catawba River

Toward the southeast, through west-central North Carolina and into South Carolina, flows the Catawba River. In northern South Carolina, it joins the Wateree and later the Santee. It took the name "Catawba" from a tribe of Indians that lived along its banks. The Catawba Indians, who also lived in Georgia, spoke a Siouan language, as did several other tribes of the Carolinas and Georgia. Most of these groups were small, but the Catawba numbered five thousand at one time.

From their legends, we know the Catawba had trouble with tribes living near them who spoke other languages. These included the Cherokee, Tuscarora, Creek, and even the Shawnee, most of whom lived farther to the north and west. The warlike Cherokee probably troubled the Catawba repeatedly; the Shawnee attacked them only occasionally.

A coral snake. (*Photo courtesy of United States Department of Agriculture*)

Their special enemies, however, seemed to be the Iroquoian-speaking Tuscarora. After Europeans arrived, the Catawba joined the whites in driving the Tuscarora north, where they became part of the Iroquois league in New York and Canada. If they had realized they would in turn be squeezed off their own lands, the Catawba might have been less willing to help drive out the Tuscarora.

Legends mention animals as well as people with which the Catawba came in contact. Of course, Indians didn't use the names we have given these animals. When a Catawba tale told of "one with a tail clear of hair," it was about the opossum. "The terrapin that smells" came to be called stink turtle by white settlers and musk turtle by naturalists.

Other mammals about which the Catawba had stories were the wolf, bear, deer, squirrel, chipmunk, and rabbit. They told tales of mud, snapping, and box turtles. When they talked about big frogs they meant bullfrogs, and little ones in their stories probably were tree frogs. Toads could have been either American toads or spadefoots. As for birds, they wove yarns about eagles, hawks, buzzards, red-winged blackbirds, blue jays, mockingbirds, cowbirds, doves, and flickers.

Many Catawba legends dealt with snakes. A particular favorite in stories was the blacksnake, which naturalists generally refer to as the black racer to keep it separate from other very dark reptiles. The Catawba had a legend to tell how the first black racer came into the world.

According to this legend, some very bad people lived on earth. They planned to kill a group of women, but someone learned of the plot. The women couldn't run away, but they had magic and turned themselves into wild animals. One woman became a snake, a black one so

she could hide in dark places. Other women turned into other creatures, and, after the bad men left, the animals became women again. But they left behind in the woods animals like the ones they had been.

The Catawba told many of their stories to teach lessons to young people. Another black-racer tale taught youngsters not to be show-offs and not to cry. In it, a tree frog was crying. A bullfrog came along and boasted he could cry better than the tree frog. He cried hard, until the tree frog admitted the bullfrog did a better job of it. But a black racer heard the racket and came up behind the bullfrog and swallowed him.

The elements of this last legend show that the Catawba observed animal life around them. A bullfrog can make more noise than a tree frog, and black racers do slip up on small animals and swallow them. Some snakes, known as constrictors, wrap their coils around their victims and squeeze them to death. The black racer closes its mouth over the victim's head so the prey cannot breathe. If the black racer cannot hold the prey with its mouth, it crawls on top of its victim and tries to pin it to the ground with the weight of its body.

The black racer reaches a length of four to six feet and is one of the swiftest snakes. Only adult snakes are really black. Younger ones appear grayish with numerous blotches of brown. Both young and old are whitish or yellowish on the throat and gray along the belly.

Other snakes occur in Catawba myths. One story tells of a snake wrapping itself around a man. The constrictors that the Catawba would have encountered were the common rat snake, the corn snake, the pine snake, the king snake, and the scarlet snake. All of these are too small to do what the constrictor in this tale does. Perhaps the point

of the story was to show the children that the man would not have got into trouble had he minded his own business.

In the story, a Catawba found a turtle fighting a snake beside a river. The Catawba respected turtles and not snakes, so the man shot an arrow pinning the snake to a rock. Immediately, a bigger snake came out of the rock to attack the man. The Indian yelled for his people to bring a boat, but they didn't come, and the snake coiled around him. The man's call for help grew fainter, fainter, and faded away. The snake hid the body in the riverbank, below the water level. When the river went down, other Indians found the dead man, whose blood had been sucked out by the snake.

Not many elements of this story seem realistic. A blood-sucking snake existed only in the imagination of the Catawba, for snakes cannot suck. Several other snakes about which the Catawba told tales also lived only in the superstitions of the Indians. One of these was the whip snake. Some storyteller invented it to frighten children into being industrious.

If youngsters showed signs of being lazy, they heard about the whip snake. It would wait for them as they poked along a trail, and before they knew what was happening, it would use its long body to tie them up. Then, with its free tail, it would whip them. After that, they would never be good for anything, would be unable to win mates, hunt successfully, or get any corn or pumpkins to grow.

If a boy doubted the existence of the whip snake, someone probably showed him the coachwhip. It is one of the longest snakes of the Carolinas and Georgia, sometimes reaching a length of more than seven feet. A racer like its close relative the blacksnake, it has a very slender



Fancy Catawba pottery, one piece with a snake figure on it. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

body and a tail with a whiplike appearance. Being even swifter than the black racer, it might seem to lash its tail about as it speeds away in the bushes. Coachwhip snakes have western relatives known as whip snakes, but of course none of these snakes can tie people up.

Another imaginary reptile of the Catawba was adopted by white men, who called it the glass snake. Supposedly this snake, if hit, broke into several pieces. All the parts crawled away and, once safely hidden, put themselves back together again. To keep the glass snake from reassembling itself, the Indians threw it into a fire. The story of the glass snake taught young people to burn any snake if they wanted to be certain it was dead. But how were white men fooled into believing such a snake existed?

Some white explorers and settlers of North America had as many superstitions as the Indians. They brought tales of werewolves and vampires with them, so accepting a yarn about a snake "pulling itself together"

came easy. Besides, the Indians could "show" them that such a thing happened.

Around the Catawba lived a snakelike lizard. Because it lacked legs, the Indians and most whites called it a snake. They didn't realize lizards have eyelids and ear openings, which snakes do not, and that lizards have many rows of scales along their bellies, but snakes have a single row. When hit, this glass-snake lizard, as we call it, often lost its long tail, which might break into more than one piece. As the lizard escaped, it could leave more than half its length of two or three feet behind.

If a man watched to see what rock or log the lizard hid under, he could turn this object over several days later

Hunters made good use of their observations of animals when they disguised themselves in skins to approach deer. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)



and find the creature with its tail in place. But the Indians and whites made a mistake in thinking it was the same tail. If they were observant, they noticed it was shorter than the original had been. It was a new tail grown to replace the one that had been lost.

Other lizards living among the hickory, southern pine, white pine, ash, gum, and yellow poplar trees of Catawba country included whiptail lizards, brown skinks, swifts, and the American chameleon. Because they all had legs, the Indians recognized them as being different from the rainbow, mud, ring-necked, rough green, hog-nosed, garter, ribbon, red-bellied, and water snakes. But any quick movement among sumac shrubs, azalea bushes, or honeysuckle vines startled a Catawba. He kept a close watch for snakes as he hunted deer, bear, fox, raccoons, or wildcats in the forests where elm, maple, hemlock, cottonwood, rhododendron, catalpa, mulberry, and beech trees grew.

Women working in fields of corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and sunflowers also walked with care. The Catawba saw more dangerous snakes than the Indians of northern states. In addition to timber rattlers and copperheads, they had to beware of cottonmouths, pigmy rattlers, and the highly poisonous little coral snakes.

They were probably rarely bitten by coral snakes, for these small burrowers hide from enemies. If a person steps near one, it glides away or lies still as if hoping to go unnoticed. But if a person steps on it, it tries to bite instantly. Because of its small mouth and short fangs, it might fail to injure a grown person. But if a coral snake forces its venom into the flesh, even a strong, healthy adult might die.

The poison of the coral snake, like that of the cobra,

attacks the nerve centers, bringing on paralysis and interfering with breathing. The venom of rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths, by contrast, attacks the red blood cells and causes them to dissolve. A strong person's cells and blood vessels may be able to absorb this second type of poison, especially if a man remains quiet, so that the blood carries the venom less quickly through the body.

The Catawba had various remedies for snakebite. The most effective one came from the milkweed plant. The milk of the plant was applied to the wound, and if the plant was in bloom the blossoms were used to make a poultice, for the juice in the blossoms was considered the best medicine for snakebite. The Catawba thought that if the person survived the snake died.

These Indians believed that poisonous snakes could cure headaches. They looked on the timber rattler as the chief snake, and when a Catawba saw one, he would try to kill it. If he succeeded, he skinned it carefully and kept the skin, which he tied around his head whenever it throbbed. But if it caused him to see snakes in his dreams, he grew frightened and threw it away. The Catawba considered dreams about snakes to be omens of bad events to come.

If a woman dreamed of a snake, she feared her crops would fail or be stolen. If the corn failed, her family suffered, for corn was the most important crop for the Catawba. They baked it, parched it, and made bread from corn flour. They wove cornhusks into mats for the dirt floors of their stick-and-bark houses.

To keep people from stealing crops, women stood sticks in the fields. A snake legend told them to do this. According to the story, an old man had a melon patch that

produced large melons. Somebody stole a few, after which the man erected sharp poles among the vines. When somebody came to steal his melons again, the sticks would turn to snakes and made the thief run away.

When not working in the fields, women made clothing from the hides of deer. Because they experienced hot summers and fairly mild winters, they wore little clothing. Much of the time they went barefooted, and their skirts and breechcloths often were skimpy.

Besides making clothes, women wove baskets of cane gathered from rivers. Thin strips of white oak wood served as handles for the baskets, and dyes were used to add

The Catawba used deerskin for heads of pottery drums as well as for clothing. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



color. The women produced a dark-brown to black dye from walnut bark and red or yellow from puccoon roots.

The Catawba purposely lived along waterways, such as the Catawba River. In addition to getting cane from streams, they caught mammals and fish there. Beaver, mink, muskrat, and otter lived in the rivers of the Carolinas and Georgia. Alligators inhabited the more southerly swamps.

Among fish caught were trout, perch, crappie, bass, bream, carp, and catfish. An expert shot could hit fish with arrows. Unlike the heavier wooden arrows used for hunting deer and bear, the arrow for fishing had a cane shaft sharpened to a point or tipped with flint. Some men fished with spears, and the Catawba also wove fish traps of white oak splints.

During summer, boys and girls learned lessons by copying grown-ups rather than by hearing legends. Some clans had rules against telling stories in the warm season, and all Catawba had laws that forbade storytelling at night. Tales were to be related by day, preferably in winter. If a man told a story at night, he invited a snake to bite him. The same fate threatened, to a lesser degree, if he told stories in summer. A snake overhearing a man relating a yarn after dark would lie in wait beside a path to bite him.

The Catawba had logical reasons for beliefs that frightened their people into being industrious. Summer was a time for working hard, and a time-waster wasn't allowed to make use of tale telling to get out of his labors. If he told tales in winter, he wouldn't be wasting the best time of the year. Night was meant for sleeping, and most Catawba arose before dawn to work. If a man stayed awake at night narrating legends, he might still be sleepy at

dawn and want to remain on his mat. Youngsters who stayed up to listen might also feel lazy the next day. So snake beliefs scared the Catawba into leaving storytelling to periods when it wouldn't interfere with work.



CHAPTER SIX

Near the Eastern Gulf of Mexico

Ancestors of some Indian tribes reached the areas in which white men found them after fairly straight migrations from Asia by way of Alaska. Scientists think the Delaware Indians descended from such ancestors. The forefathers of other tribes wandered more. Because the Hopewell Indians had some similarities to the Maya in Mexico and Central America, anthropologists think ancestors of the Hopewell may have gone south from Alaska. Perhaps after centuries in Mexico or Central America they returned north and traveled east.

Of course, not all scientists agree that all American Indians came by way of northern Asia and Alaska. While some Indians look rather Oriental, others appear to be as Caucasian as the whites who came from Europe. Some

A Seminole village in Florida. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

anthropologists think ancestors of many tribes, especially those of Latin America, came in canoes across the Pacific. In any case, most peoples probably wandered for centuries before finally establishing permanent territories.

Wanderers made up the Five Civilized Tribes of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, West Virginia, the Carolinas, and Florida. These were the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole tribes. They came to be called civilized because they had permanent villages and in time adopted somewhat democratic forms of government.

There were only four of these tribes when white men came to North America, for the Seminoles didn't exist until the 1700's. By then white men were confining the southeastern Indians to certain areas. A large group of Creek broke away and fled to Florida, which was still owned by Spain, and where they lived more freely. There were few Indians left in this region. Early Spanish explorers and settlers, through warfare and disease, had wiped out the Calusa in the south and the Timucua in northern Florida. Small groups from a number of other tribes also joined the runaway Creek. They all received the name Seminole, a word which means "the ones who ran off."

All the Five Civilized Tribes had legends which indicate they came from the west and south—Mexico or Central America. At least one legend suggests that one group settled along the Ohio River before moving closer to the Gulf of Mexico. This has led some anthropologists to wonder whether these Indians were perhaps descended from the Hopewell and Adena Indians. Because some of them lived near Indian mounds, some scientists believed they must be the offspring of the Mound Builders.

The Creek, particularly, lived near ancient mounds,

but investigations of these mounds show they differ from the Hopewell burial and animal-figure mounds. The more southerly mounds were high places to hold temples. The Creek had neither Hopewell-style earthworks nor temple mounds. They only piled up small dirt platforms on which they placed the houses of chiefs and priests. Scientists now believe the members of the Five Civilized Tribes descended from neither the Midwestern Hopewell nor the Mound Builders of the Southeast, but probably liked the idea of mounds when they discovered them and so built small imitations for the houses of important men.

The Civilized Tribes didn't look on themselves as the descendants of earlier peoples any more than did most other groups. They had creation stories to explain how they came into the world and to account for snakes and other creatures as well. Perhaps the main creation legend concerned two gods, one good and one bad, who came to earth in search of a satisfactory place to live.

The earth, in this story, was very new. It couldn't really be seen, for a heavy fog covered it. To get rid of the fog, the gods lifted it above their heads and formed the clouds in the sky. They found the land to be beautiful, with trees, shrubs, flowers, and streams. But everything was so small that the earth hardly made a suitable place for the gods to live.

Before they looked for a home elsewhere, the good god suggested they put living things on earth to enjoy its beauty. The bad one, being lazy, said for the other to go ahead. So the good one made opossums, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, beaver, and the like. He took branches from oak, walnut, beech, ash, catalpa, haw, dogwood, cedar, or magnolia trees for bodies, and used twigs for heads, tails, and legs. After a while, the bad god noticed all the

animals were good ones. Being less than good himself, he was annoyed, yet he was too lazy to do anything about it for a time.

Before long the bad god saw that the good spirit left some animals unfinished. Perhaps they didn't develop to suit him. Since it would take little effort to make something of these, the lazy god turned them into *chitta*, the snake, who had cunning and a cruel heart. The bad god also made the skunk, the scorpion, and the alligator.

In a modern telling of this legend, the good god made Indian men of logs, but some of these logs didn't change into men. The bad spirit took these and made white men of them—a story which shows what the Civilized Tribes came to think of whites.

After Indians were created, the good spirit gave them a pole and told them to stick it in the ground at nightfall so it stood straight up. In the morning they should move, going in the direction toward which the pole leaned. Each day at dusk they should plant the pole and each morning go as it indicated.

They obeyed, and each morning the pole slanted toward the rising sun. So they traveled east, protected by a huge dog that most animals feared. Occasionally one of the Indians stepped near a snake and got bitten. His companions called the dog, which licked the wound and cured it.

At last the people came to a wide river, supposedly the Mississippi. In one tribe's story, they swam the river, but the dog got stuck in a bog at the edge. After that, when one of them killed an enemy, he was supposed to throw the scalp into a body of water for the dog. Another tribe's form of the legend says they built a raft, but a log broke loose and the dog sank to the river bottom. Yet an-

A Cherokee wooden dance mask with a coiled snake on top. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



other version says the dog guided them to the Mississippi and they acquired the pole only after losing the dog. In any case, a pole directed them after they crossed the river.

One morning when they awoke, the pole still stood straight up (some Indians say it had put forth blossoms), and they knew they had reached their goal. They called the place Chickasaw Old Fields, and this is one reason the Chickasaw tribe claims to be the parent group of all the others. The Creek won't accept this, and say theirs is the tribe from which the others developed.

Scientists still wonder where Chickasaw Old Fields existed. They have suggested Lee County or Tippah County, Mississippi, and Madison County, Alabama. When white men arrived, the Chickasaw and Choctaw lived mainly in Alabama and Mississippi. The Creek occupied areas in Georgia and Alabama, and the Cherokee



At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Choctaw still ground corn in a mortar hollowed from a log, as their ancestors had done. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

occupied mountain areas of West Virginia and on south.

While migrating to their new homes, the Civilized Tribes lived mainly by hunting. They learned not to eat animals found dead, which saved them from food poisoning. After they set up permanent villages and began to grow corn, gourds, squash, and beans, their tribal rules

still forbade them to eat any animals except those they killed themselves.

Although they ate mostly deer meat, men of the Civilized Tribes hunted fox, raccoon, wildcat, and other animals for their skins. The lowest ranks of people dressed in garments of skunk skins. Living in a warm climate, the Indians went barefoot much of the time, donning moccasins mainly for traveling. They wore very brief breechcloths and skirts, and both men and women usually went naked from the waist up except in midwinter.

Although they went about scantily clad, they decorated their bodies more than most other American Indians. They used vegetable dyes frequently, but they also tattooed patterns into their flesh. The Natchez Indians along the Mississippi River, who were related to the Civilized Tribes, sometimes completely covered their bodies with decoration.

When cool weather arrived, men might put on leggings and perhaps wore breechcloths that hung halfway to their knees. The women then wore skirts reaching their knees, and most people had fur robes. Priests and chiefs wore robes of feathers, which came from ducks, geese, woodcock, quail, hermit thrushes, mockingbirds, flycatchers, red-winged blackbirds, goldfinch, and other common birds.

Killing animals worried the Civilized Tribes more than it did many Indians. They thought bad spirits escaped from the animals killed and went about the world seeking revenge. Such a belief aided conservation, for hunters never killed needlessly. To balance this, the people believed good spirits came from plants. Why else did plants supply medicines?

Every Choctaw and many men of other tribes carried a

medicine bag on a strap over his shoulder or around his waist. In this he kept medicines and secret objects supposed to hold magic powers. No man ever told what was in his medicine bag, and another Indian never asked.

Among their medicines, the Choctaw had snakebite remedies. These consisted of roots of certain plants, such as plantain, horehound, and at least one fern. If a man was bitten by a snake he would snatch a root from his medicine pouch, chew it quickly, swallow some of the juice, and apply the mushy fibers to the wound. Supposedly few people who used a snakebite remedy died. Some medicine men reportedly chewed certain roots, spit the juice on their hands, and handled rattlesnakes without being bitten.

They found plenty of rattlers to handle, for timber, pigmy, and eastern diamondback rattlesnakes lived around them. Other dangerous snakes were cottonmouths, or water moccasins, and copperheads. The most dangerous snake was the coral snake, and it is unlikely that Indians tried to handle it. It strikes instantly if touched.

Harmless snakes mistaken for the coral could be the scarlet king and the scarlet snake, for all three have red, yellow, and black bands around their bodies. But on the scarlet and the scarlet king snakes, every other band is black. On the coral snake, every other band is yellow. That's why you'll hear, "Red on yellow, beware that fellow."

Besides the scarlet king and scarlet snakes, the Civilized Tribes saw such harmless ones as black racer, coachwhip, garter, ribbon, cone-nosed, yellow-lipped, flat-headed, corn, indigo, pine, hog-nosed, black swamp, rainbow, and mud snakes. They didn't usually try to kill snakes, as they

believed doing so might bring bad luck. But anytime a snake seemed to threaten him, a man took its life rather than risk his own. Having killed it, he would talk to the body, saying he had been trying to protect it but that an evil spirit had been stronger than him and had killed it.

After killing a snake, a hunter watched for spirits. One in which the Civilized Tribes believed was ten feet tall. It went about hiding deer, so if game became scarce, the Indians thought one of these spirits haunted them and



A Cherokee mask made from a hornet's nest. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

they moved away. Another spirit in which they believed measured only about three feet tall, and it brought the deer out of hiding. Even though the little spirit made game plentiful, the Indians feared it. They might leave a good hunting area if they thought such a creature had its eye on them.

Only hunters and medicine men claimed to have the power to see the little men. If a hunter thought one followed him on the trail, he tried to rid himself of it rather than lead it back to his village. According to tradition, animals could see these little men. A wasp's sting caused them to die. If a hunter believed one of the small spirits trailed him, he searched for a wasps' nest to knock down. This meant he got stung, but he would survive, and he believed the spirit would not.

The Civilized Tribes respected some spirits and honored them. Part of the first buck that a man killed in summer and part of the first one he shot in winter went to the gods as an offering. He placed the offering in a fire for the smoke to carry upward to the spirits.

The offering probably didn't include the head. A hunter often took a deer's head, cleaned it out, and wore it over his own head when hunting. Part of the hide hung around his shoulders. As he slipped past azalea bushes, sumac vines, black-eyed Susans, wood violets, Cherokee roses, and locust, pecan, poplar, and pine trees, he resembled a deer himself, and so could approach deer much closer in this way.

If brambles scratched his legs, he hardly noticed. As a boy he had grown tough. Some of the tribes made the boys dive into pools or streams on winter mornings to toughen them as well as to wash away their misdeeds. If a boy refused to bathe when ice had to be broken on the

water, he appeared to his comrades as a criminal. They caught him and held him down while a medicine man scratched his legs with the fangs of snakes or the sharp teeth of fish. The scratches bled, the skin hardened, and the boy was forbidden to do anything to relieve the pain but had to allow it to go away gradually as his legs healed.

Fish teeth might come from bream, bass, catfish, trout, pike, perch, crappie, and carp. Some of the tribes ate fish, but more often they wanted them for fertilizing their crops of sunflowers, pumpkins, corn, and other plants. The teeth also might serve as the needles they used when they tattooed their bodies. When they wanted fish, they made drugs of certain plants and dumped these into a pool. The fish came to the surface, unconscious or gasping for oxygen, and the Indians scooped them out.

Girls as well as boys had to bathe on cold mornings, but girls escaped having their legs scraped if they balked. As among other tribes, women ranked below men even though they did more than half the work. Besides farming, the girls learned to cook, make persimmon bread, sew clothing, and produce most of the household goods.

The Civilized Tribes made better pottery than many groups east of the Mississippi. They produced bowls, cups, jars, plates, pots, and pipes. Most of these remained undecorated, but special pieces received more attention. Jars for ceremonies or to be buried with a chief to serve him in the next life usually had designs. A favorite pattern was rattlesnakes; perhaps they were destined to frighten away the chief's enemies in the next world. There were also flying snakes and many with horns.

A horned snake, called Sint-holo, had special importance, and the Civilized Tribes honored it. The Indians

believed this sacred creature was invisible to most people, but it would show itself to a boy now and then. When a boy proved to be wiser than the other boys, the people of his group firmly believed he had seen a horned reptile.

Sint-holo lived in a cave below water level in a riverbank. When it wanted to change its location, it brought on heavy rains. As the land became soaked or flooded, Sint-holo crawled from one place to another. It could make a noise like thunder but was not the same as the thunder spirit, who was its enemy. If an Indian of the Civilized Tribes heard thunder when alone in the woods, he hurried to a high place. If it was Sint-holo thundering, the Indian feared he might be overtaken by a flash flood.



Sequoya must have "seen a horned reptile," for he developed this alphabet for his people. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



Seminole skinning an alligator in the Florida Everglades. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

Another snake in which some of the Civilized Tribes believed had one eye in the middle of its head. It pulled men inside its cave and never let them out again. Of course, no one was sure where such a reptile lived. Indians who went bear hunting in winter didn't believe in single-eyed snakes, for they dared seek bears in caves.

To prepare for a bear hunt, the men drank special medicines and went without eating or seeing their wives for four days. Then, after a feast, they went to mountainous country and searched out caves. Being among the best trackers in the United States, men of the Civilized Tribes could often tell which caves had been used by bears and which had not.

Finding a likely cave, some men went in. Those entering the cavern carried firebrands to light their way. They watched ahead for glowing spots, which would be the bear's eyes reflecting the light of the torches. As soon as they saw such spots, they shot their arrows at them. If the animal charged, the men threw themselves flat on the ground, trusting the bear would rush over them and out of the cave, to be killed by the Indians who waited outside.

Among the Civilized Tribes, the Chickasaw made the poorest workers. As a result, they sometimes turned to the Choctaw in winter for food, which they received if their neighbors had any. The Chickasaw devoted much time to hunting; the Choctaw paid more attention to crops.

Choctaw men also made good hunters, however. Many carried roots supposed to have magic that would bring deer to them. And they worked hard. A Choctaw hunter rose before dawn, and when training boys he routed them out before the sun came up. Not only would he not let them go back to sleep, which might bring poor luck, he wouldn't even let them sit on a handy log. Choctaw and Chickasaw hunted in one another's territory, but if they caught unrelated Indians on their land, they chased them off or shot them.

On occasion, a member of the Civilized Tribes killed one of his own people. When this happened, the oldest living brother of the murdered man would seek revenge. Often a killer would flee to a swamp, for, until the Seminole settled in Florida, many of the people of the Civilized Tribes avoided swamps because of their alligators and poisonous reptiles. But a man who had little hope of escaping the revenge of an angry enemy would rather face the perils of the swamp; if he was caught by his pursuer, he was not permitted to explain or reason with him.

Even if a man came from another tribe and spoke another language, he could make himself understood if given a chance, for most Indians used some sign language. Signs might vary from tribe to tribe, but with effort an Indian from one part of North America could "talk" by signs with a man from another area. Related tribes often had a common spoken language, too, though not always. The Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw spoke languages known as Muskhogean; the Cherokee spoke an Iroquoian tongue. Seminoles, being mostly Creek, used a Muskhogean language.



CHAPTER SEVEN

On High Places of the Southwest

Many Indians, such as the Five Civilized Tribes, believed their ancestors came from the west. There were also groups that thought their people had journeyed from the east. The Keresan (also called Keres, Queres, or Queresan) Indians had legends to indicate their people had come from the Mediterranean area.

The ancient Phoenicians colonized the European and African shores of the Mediterranean before the time of Christ. Traders from Carthage, a Phoenician colony, sailed into the Atlantic and reached the British Isles. A few scientists believe storms drove some Phoenician vessels so far off course that they reached North America. If this happened, Phoenicians may have been the ancestors of some American Indians.

Modern-day Navajo look toward mesas, high places like those to which their ancestors helped drive the Keresan. (*Photo courtesy of Bureau of Indian Affairs*)

Anthropologists study the origins of words to help support the theory that some Indians are of Phoenician descent. For instance, when Spanish explorers reached the Southwest, the Keresan Indians called themselves Han-no. This can be translated roughly as "to the east." The same word appeared in the Phoenician language. In addition, Keresan storytellers of long ago introduced old legends with the word *humma-ha*. This meant "when in the east."

Newer tales did not receive this "once upon a time" opening. Older tales frequently can be distinguished from newer ones by the animals involved. Ancient stories often told of two-headed serpents or other imaginary monsters; more recent ones featured southwestern creatures, such as prairie dogs, coyotes, antelope, sidewinder rattlesnakes, and road runners.

A *humma-ha* legend tells of a great green serpent, Siti-Shri-Wa, that grew from a little worm. An orphan girl found it beside the ocean and made a cup in the sand for it. She kept the hollow filled with water and fed the worm regularly. It grew and grew, and when necessary she enlarged the depression in the sand to fit Siti-Shri-Wa. At last it became so big she had to connect the basin with the ocean. The big green serpent swam out to sea, but it always returned to care for her and her people in time of need.

The Keresan were living far from the ocean when first seen by Europeans, and some scholars think they once must have lived by a sea in order to have such legends. Students of Keresan life use this story as an indication that the ancestors of the Keresan traveled at sea, perhaps coming from the Mediterranean.

A snake legend which developed after the Keresan settled in the Southwest features more realistic animals. Long ago a snake with yellowish markings (perhaps a patch-

nosed snake, a leaf-nosed snake, or a corn snake) lived to the north. Coyote lived near mesas, great platforms of rock rising up from the desert. Coyote met Snake after Snake had been successful hunting rabbits. Coyote asked for a rabbit to take to his mother, but Snake said he couldn't spare one. Coyote then asked where he could hunt to catch his own.

Seeing that Coyote was serious about getting food, Snake suggested they be friends. After Coyote agreed, Snake gave him four rabbits (the number four held magic in the minds of many tribes). In addition, Snake invited Coyote to visit his home after four days, and Coyote agreed.

After four days Coyote called on Snake. He sat on a stool and ate corn cooked with squash. When he left, Coyote invited Snake to come to his home four days later. Snake did so. When Coyote offered a stool, Snake said he always coiled on the ground. Coyote asked his mother to bring food, but when she started to prepare corn, Snake stopped her. He asked for pollen to be put on top of his head. With his long tongue, Snake gathered the pollen into his mouth. When he left, he asked Coyote to visit him in four days.

By this time, Coyote realized how different he was from his friend. Before going to visit Snake, he tied strips of bark to his tail until he had a great snakelike tail. Arriving at Snake's home, he didn't sit on a stool but turned around and around until his tail was coiled into a circle. Then he lay in the middle of the coil. Trying to do what he thought was polite, he asked Snake's mother to put pollen on his head. Unfortunately, his tongue couldn't reach it, and he got nothing to eat. In time he pretended to be full and said he would go home. As he got up, he tripped over his coil of bark.

Snake felt sorry for him. To do Coyote a favor, Snake set fire to the fake tail as the end of it went out the door. Coyote didn't notice until the fire reached his real tail and burned him. Apparently it didn't harm him, for coyotes still have bushy tails today, but coyotes and snakes can hardly be called friends anymore.

Not all Keresan believed their people came from the east. Some claimed to be from the north, a theory accepted by more scientists than the one about eastern origins. The fact that Snake lives in the north in the Snake-Coyote tale supports such a belief. One theory doesn't disprove the other, however. It is possible that Phoenicians landed at Florida, traveled north and west, and finally reached Kansas and Colorado. Long before the end of the migration, they would have become Indians, having traveled for hundreds of years and adopted ways of life from peoples along the way.

They remained in their new homes long enough to leave signs that they had been there. In time they drifted south, perhaps under pressure from powerful groups of Indians on the plains or in the Rocky Mountains. On reaching Arizona and New Mexico they settled along the Rio Grande and other rivers and lived as farmers.

Similar groups in the Southwest are the Hopi and Zuñi Indians. The Keresan may be related to these, and many scientists say the Keresan are Hopi who broke away to live separately. In this case the Keresan made an eastern migration, for the Hopi are found mainly in Arizona and the Keresan live in New Mexico. In their last migration, the Keresan moved straight up—to the tops of high places.

The relatively peaceful Keresan suffered attacks from the Apache and Navajo. Fairly level lands near the rivers left them open to raids, so they sought locations more

easily defended. Near their farms, great mesas rose three hundred feet or so up from the level land. The Indians found narrow gullies that could be turned into paths up the mesa walls. A handful of men could defend one of these paths against invaders struggling up from below, so the Keresan moved to the tops of the rock platforms, as did the Hopi. They became cliff dwellers about three hundred years before white men came to New Mexico. Only when they returned to their farms along the rivers did the Keresan have to fear their enemies.

In time, enemies developed a fear of the Keresan because of the way the mesa Indians punished captives. The Keresan took prisoners to the edge of the mesa top for a look down. Below, the captives would see a drop of a few hundred feet, perhaps broken by jagged outcroppings of rock from the mesa wall. Once they had seen the frightening prospect below, the prisoners received an order to jump. The bravest ones did so. The Keresan prodded a

A mesa with a Keresan pueblo, or village, on top. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



hesitant man in the rump with a sharp spear or, if that failed, with a firebrand. Once in a while one of these prisoners survived the fall, to be a cripple for the rest of his life.

Even though they were peaceful, the Keresan prepared for war. They had flint-tipped arrows that their powerful bows drove through the metal armor of the Spanish. They made clubs about two feet long in which they imbedded sharp bits of flint. Reportedly, a Keresan could split an enemy in two with one of these.

The mesa tops provided mainly clay as building material. This suited the Keresan, who dried the clay in the sun to make the adobe with which they built. Some clay was carried up the steep paths from the rivers. Instead of spreading their pueblos, or villages, across the mesa tops, the Keresan often built rooms on top of other rooms. They developed "apartment houses" two to four stories high. The upper rooms were reached by ladders, which gave the Indians additional protection. If enemies did reach the top of a Keresan mesa, the villagers could climb to their upper rooms and pull the ladders up after them.

In the lowlands, the Indians had lived without heavy garments. They discovered greater temperature changes atop the mesas, with summertime highs of a hundred degrees or more and winter lows near freezing. The men began wearing shirts made of skins, and their breechcloths became long and full, almost like skirts. The men made their own clothes and did much more work than men of most other tribes. Because they spent less time in fighting and fishing, they could produce moccasins and other garments and could help the women with the farming.

When the coldest days of winter came, men and women put on rabbitskin robes. The women also made

blankets by weaving the fibers of maguey plants and wore these as "overcoats." Their regular garments were wrap-around dresses, woven from cotton, that left both arms uncovered and fell to about their knees. To improve the looks of their garments, the Keresan dyed them with mineral colors. They also tanned skins, for they had discovered that canaigre—a type of dock—had a root containing considerable amounts of tannic acid.

To add decoration, men and women fastened feathers to their clothing, especially to their robes, and they kept flocks of turkeys mainly as a supply of feathers. A pregnant woman wore a turkey feather in her belt to ensure that her child would have a full head of hair when it was born. Although Keresan ate turkey eggs, they never ate the birds, as the Indians of the Northeast did.

In the lowlands, the Keresan had to watch for rattlesnakes and scorpions in their fields of corn, beans, and hard cotton, and in patches of sagebrush and greasewood. On the mesas they found few of these animals, but the women continued to wear the leggings that had protected them in the lowlands, for these had become the style. The leggings consisted of long strips of tanned antelope skins wrapped around and around the legs from their moccasins to their knees. A snake could bite through a single layer of buckskin, so they wrapped one layer on top of another, until the leggings built up to a thickness of two or three inches.

From an early age boys and girls learned to observe nature around the mesas. They listened carefully to birds, as the Keresan, like many Indians of other regions, believed a bird's song took on a life of its own once the bird uttered it. Hearing a dove cooing or a thrush or a grosbeak singing, a boy paid close attention. By being able to recognize the song of the bird, a Keresan hoped to recog-

nize it in its new form if he met it later. For all he knew, it might become a witch. The Keresan thought every illness came from a witch's spell.

These Indians believed that various spirits lived above the earth. Good spirits and gods were high above, and witches lived just above the ground. When they moved to the mesas, the pueblo builders hoped to get nearer good spirits and above the witches as well as away from Apache and Navajo.

A mother took care that her newborn baby remained safe from witches. She watched for them at all times. To make sure they didn't slip past her and reach the child, she kept near his bed some perfectly formed ears of corn and a special stick used to stir corn as it cooked. An owl hooting in the night, crows flying directly over a pueblo,

Rabbit sticks from the mesas of the Southwest. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



a black dog digging around a cemetery, or an animal, such as a mountain lion, traveling far from its natural home, warned that witches lurked nearby. Even the shamans, or medicine men, couldn't outsmart all the witches.

The shamans formed secret organizations, or medicine societies. When fighting witches, they wore bear paws over their hands. The left front paw served best in driving away witches, for, according to Keresan belief, bears are all left-handed. The right front paw proved next best, then the left hind paw, and finally the right hind paw. Shamans came to be called "bears." Their different societies specialized in treating different illnesses. The snake-medicine organization treated bites of rattlesnakes and poisonous spiders and the stings of scorpions.

Shamans in all medicine societies used snakes in the treatment of ailments. If a man had internal disorders, he obviously suffered from a witch's spell. The witch had probably slipped a snake, dwarf-palm needles, cactus spines, or sand into his stomach. The medicine man had to "remove" these objects. When visiting a sick man, the "bear" secretly made a pile of objects supposed to have passed from the patient's body into the "bear's" and then out of his mouth. This pile might include a snake. After the medicine man showed the ill person this pile of pain-causing objects, everyone expected the patient to get better. If he died, witches received the blame.

Every society, whether practicing medicine or not, kept secrets from people outside the group. Boys heard nothing of these secrets until they were invited into the societies, which happened when they approached manhood. The grown men considered a boy to be approaching manhood when he could be trusted to keep secrets from younger boys and girls.

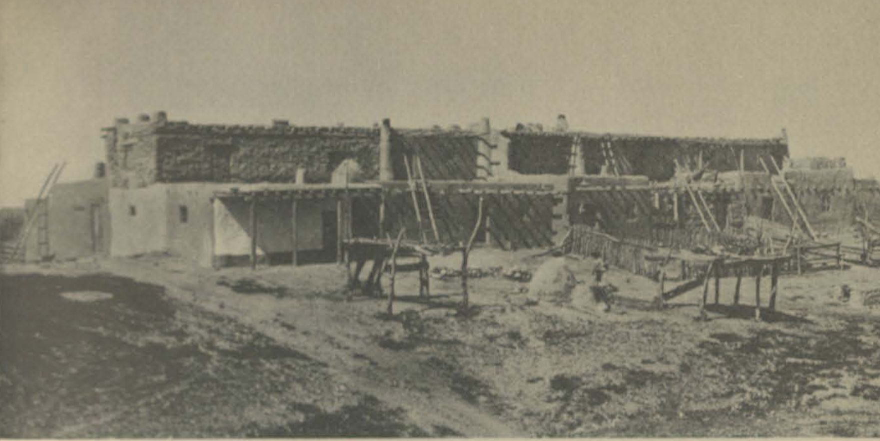
A boy in his early teens took part in a sport in which he

competed against girls. A group of boys and girls went into brushy country armed with rabbit sticks. These curved oak clubs, about two feet long, had slender handles with thick striking knobs at one end. Boys and girls tried to outdo each other. If a girl killed a rabbit that a boy was pursuing, he had to trade clothes with her. As the hunt continued, he wore her clothes until he killed a rabbit, which he gave to the girl as payment for the return of his own garments. The boy's ability to outhunt the girls was another indication of his growing to manhood.

In his middle teens, a boy had to pass a different test. He would go to a section of a nearby river for a ceremonial bath. If he went alone he was considered especially brave, but going with a group of men and other boys didn't count against him. The boy remained there for four days and nights, taking baths at certain times. If he went in a group, the men bathed him. But the real trial of the four-day stay, whether he was alone or with others, came when a great fish appeared in the water and swam forward to help give him a bath. Many boys must have realized the "fish" was a man in costume, yet some of them cringed or even fled.

If a boy showed no fear while the "fish" bathed him, the men said he would become a great warrior and never get killed in battle. He got invitations into secret societies and had no trouble attracting a hard-working girl as his wife. A boy who cringed would be in danger of getting wounded in battle, and one who ran away would probably be killed in war.

After the four days, a boy returned to his village. Tradition said he must not look back. If he glanced over his shoulder, the magic he had acquired would leave him, and he might be confronted with a hideous monster. Back at the pueblo, he entered his family's room quietly



After being bathed by a "fish," a boy returned to his village atop a mesa. (*Photo Courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

and without attracting undue attention. This would further ensure that he would keep his magic.

While growing up, a boy learned to respect snakes and not to fear them. Among the Hopi, a boy joining a snake society had to walk among the reptiles and sometimes hold one in his mouth. At one time, the Keresan probably had similar ceremonies. Some scientists think the holding of snakes in the mouth originated with the Keresan rather than with the Hopi. In any case, a boy joining a snake society had to approach a number of snakes, bow to them, and dance around or among them. Bull snakes and king snakes as well as rattlers were collected in a four-day hunt for the initiation ceremonies. Some scientists claim the snakes were overfed shortly before the ceremonies so that they remained drowsy and tame while being handled.

If he expected to become a shaman, a boy had to grind up snake droppings, dissolve them in water, and drink the solution. He would then have dreams, the Keresan thought, to help him foretell the future. One particularly famous shaman, after drinking such a concoction, sup-

posedly threw himself full length in the dirt, pounded the ground with his fists and feet, and made unusual predictions. Some of them came true.

He said dark people wearing robes of metal would conquer them. (The Spanish, who are often dark, came in armor and enforced their rule.) Light-colored people would come later to set them free and stretch metal roads across the land. (Anglo-Saxon peoples came and stretched railroads over the desert, but many Indians today wonder if their ancestors were really freed.) The foreigners would break the spell of a witch who long ago cursed them and ended rainfall. (But the Keresan have waited in vain for rains to become abundant. Other tribes

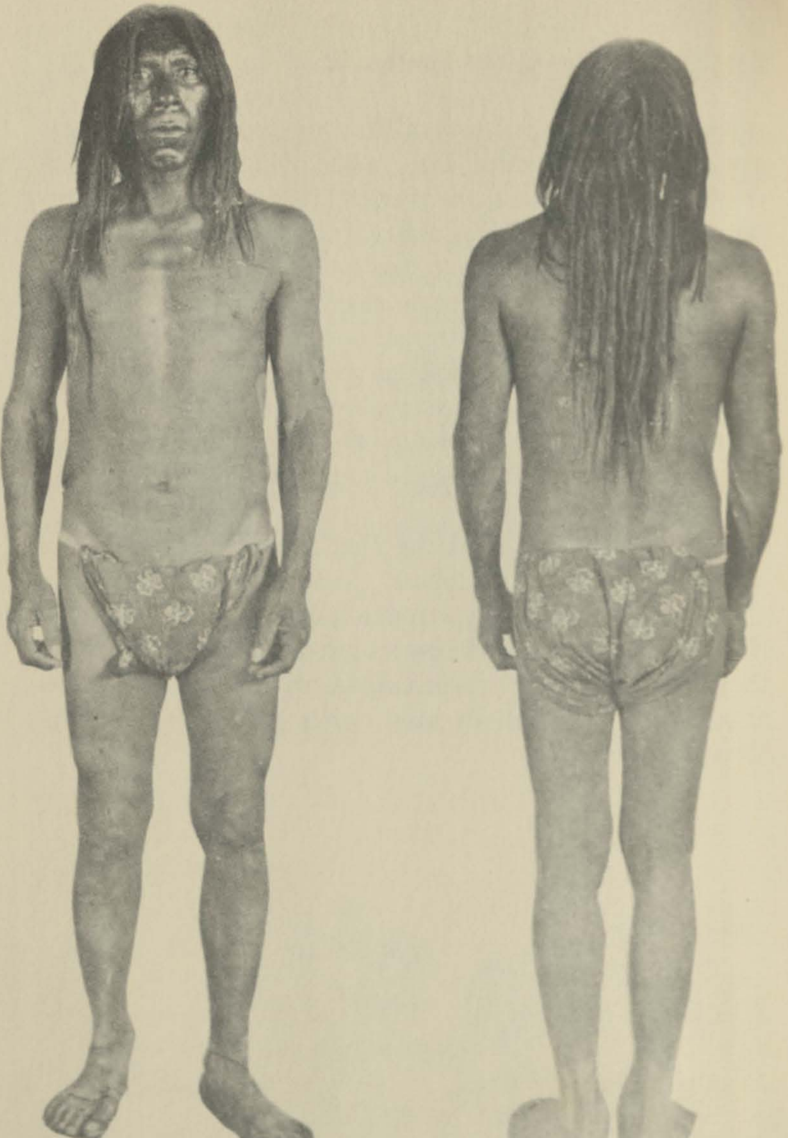
A painting by Fred Kabotie of Hopi kachina (katcina) dolls, which represent spirits, taking part in a snake ceremony. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



once called them Drinkers of the Dew, because the mesas are so arid they offer little more moisture than dew-drops.) In conclusion, the prophet promised them happiness. (But Keresan living today have decided they'll have to wait until the next life to find it.)

To draw rain, the Keresan developed a rain dance in which they handled snakes and held them in their mouths as they pranced and shuffled about. They used some rattlers, but large bull snakes played a part in the dance more often. A similar dance of the Hopi Indians remains famous today and attracts great numbers of tourists who come to watch.

The secret activities of the Hopi usually took place in kivas, or enclosed chambers, partly under and partly above ground. The Keresan made less use of kivas. Perhaps they felt life on top of the mesas gave them all the privacy they needed. It gave them enough so that less is known about them than about most other tribes west of the Mississippi River.



In modern times a Pima man's hot-weather breechcloth is of cotton rather than deerskin. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Beside the Gila and Salt Rivers

Not all Indians of the Southwest lived on mesas. The Pima, even though attacked by Apache and Yuma warriors, remained near the Gila and Salt rivers in central and southwestern Arizona. The Superstition Mountains and other hills stood close at hand, yet these people usually remained in the low places. Even Pima who claimed their ancestors had been cliff dwellers, which many anthropologists doubt, feared the mountains because of their legends.

Pima tales told of a flood that had driven their ancestors to the highest peaks and finally turned them to stone. Not to risk such a fate, the more superstitious Indians of the tribe kept to the valleys. Besides, many Pima felt that the Gila River expected them to stay. Almost every spring it flooded, leaving a rich soil in which they easily grew corn, yellow beans, white beans, melons, tobacco, and a tough cotton. If they left the river for the mountains

when trouble came, might not the river grow angry and cease to help them with its overflow?

No one knows where the Pima came from originally. They may be related to both the Hopi of the Southwest and the Aztecs of Mexico. The Pima had legends indicating that their ancestors came first from the east and then from the west.

According to one tale, the ancestors of the Pima came from the east in the company of a great spirit called Old Man Coyote. Whenever they got into trouble, he saved them. Instead of stopping in the Southwest, they continued toward the setting sun. In their last great difficulty, they reached an ocean, where a whale swallowed all those who approached it. Old Man Coyote called the leaders together and gave them a plan. Following his advice, they let the whale swallow them in one gulp. With all of them inside the whale, they stuck their spears into every vital organ and killed him.

When the whale had died, the legend says, they all crawled from his gaping mouth. Old Man Coyote was gone. Without him to tell them how to conquer the ocean, they had to turn back, and they knew it was time to settle down. They now journeyed toward the east, with one group after another finding a place to live. The Pima liked the area along the Salt River, so they remained, later spreading to the Gila as well. Other tribes called them the River People.

Like the Keresan, who had lighter skins, the Pima were peaceful. In ancient times they probably lacked weapons for fighting and used their hunting tools when forced into war. Finding they would never be left alone, they developed weapons. From a distance they fired arrows at an enemy, but they proved most skillful at hand-to-hand fighting.

In spite of an enemy's arrows or spears, the Pima bravely approached him. A Pima warrior held a tough deerskin shield before him, turned at an angle to make arrows glance aside. The fighter carried a club with which he tried to crush any enemy he could reach. A Pima never took a scalp; he feared doing so would let loose evil spirits that lived in the enemy's body.

Boys learned to use the bow before they were ten years old. Older men made bows and arrows for them, so they would have good equipment with which to learn. These were men who had been fine hunters in their younger days but who could no longer keep up with the hunt. It was an honored task to make weapons for boys. Except for being smaller, these bows and arrows were identical with adult weapons. The boys practiced their skills by shooting cottontail rabbits, badgers, quail, and doves near their homes.

They had games to help them become better hunters. One boy ran away from the others, dragging a clump of grass at which the young hunters shot. And all boys took part in foot races. As a result, the Pima became noted for swiftness, unlike the Keresan, who had the reputation of being slower and less agile.

Once a boy received his first bow and arrows, he stopped playing the games of younger children. His little brothers continued playing games such as the coyote game. One boy lay on the ground, pretending to be a coyote asleep. Other boys came toward him, following one another in a line. The leader was the guard, who protected the others. They circled the "coyote" four times, whereupon the guard nudged him awake with his foot. The "coyote" leaped to his feet and tried to catch one of the children behind the guard, while the guard tried to keep between the "coyote" and the other boys. If the "coyote"

caught a boy, the one who was caught became the next "coyote."

Sometimes girls played the game, but they started learning to be women almost from the time they could walk and so had little time for play. All the family rose early, getting up at dawn or before. Girls set off at once to fetch water while the women cooked breakfast. Once the morning meal ended, whole families went to the fields to work. They would not return home until evening. A few older women remained at the village with some young girls as helpers to prepare a light lunch. They took this to the fields so the workers could remain there throughout the day.

As evening shadows grew long, girls and women returned home to start the evening meal. If the farm work required haste, men and boys stayed at it until after dark. Otherwise they hunted in the evening. By dark or soon after, all the family gathered near the cooking area, which was outside the house. Women cooked meat by placing it on the fire or in glowing ashes, and the family ate a large supper.

With the meal finished, all families of a settlement might gather to listen to a storyteller. Among the Pima, one wise old man of each village group, which was usually a group of relatives, memorized the legends of the people. If he died suddenly and unexpectedly, other old people recalled them and taught them to a new "keeper of the history." Because each person remembered them differently, they undoubtedly underwent many changes in the course of time.

The Pima, and perhaps all other Indians, believed strongly in dreams, which supposedly foretold the future. Sometimes dreams got mixed in with legends, but the tales remained the record of Pima history. More recent records



A Pima woman works in her kitchen, which is surrounded by arrow bush. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

were kept on calendar sticks. These pieces of wood had figures and lines carved on them, not as complete stories but as memory aids. A man looking at the signs on a calendar stick could recall certain happenings and important occasions.

As in other Indian tribes, men with good imaginations often became medicine men. However, the Pima may have had fewer shamans than many other groups. According to tribal law, a medicine man who lost a patient could be put to death. Head men decided when to enforce this law. Each settlement had a small group of leaders, or head men, who made the rules. If the head men liked a shaman who lost a patient, they probably decided he could live. His fate would be less pleasant if they didn't care for him or if they felt he had been careless in treating his patient.

The medicine men used many plants of the Southwest in "cures." Thorns of the buckthorn served as lances. When a person had a pain for which no explanation could



A medicine man of recent times treats a patient by age-old methods. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

be found, a shaman used a buckthorn "needle" to puncture the skin over the aching spot. This supposedly released from captivity whatever caused the pain.

The creosote bush came close to being a cure-all. Concoctions made from it served to treat toothaches, colds, skin disorders, and even sore feet. But the Pima relied more heavily on the mesquite. This member of the mimosa family helped to cure sore lips, sore gums, and ailing eyes. The wood was used for cooking fires, and the larger trunks and branches went to make houses.

The Pima built circular houses before white men came. They used posts of mesquite, which grows as a large shrub or a small tree, to form a circle ten feet or more across. In the absence of mesquite, they used willow. They bent the tops of the posts toward each other, fastened them together, and covered them with crossbars of cottonwood. Four posts held up the center of the roof. The whole framework received a thatch of sunflower leaves. Since

thatch leaked, it might be covered with sod. The door always faced east and was so low that people had to enter on their hands and knees. The people spent time in these houses only when the weather was unusually wet or cold. Generally they ate, worked, and slept outdoors, using mats made of yucca leaves for beds. Scientists think this outdoor life explains why the Pima usually had good health and lived long lives.

Mesquite beans made both a drink and a food. Ground to a powder and mixed with water, the beans provided a sweet beverage. Moistened with just a little water and then allowed to dry out, the powdered beans made a tough bread. It was stored away in baskets woven of bark or sunflower leaves, to be used if crops failed or hunting became poor. A little of this heavy bread made a man's stomach feel full, and he could go a long time without feeling hunger pains again. Before white men came to the New World, no Indians had true ovens but baked on hot stones or in the ashes of their fires. They produced flat, tough johnny cakes or hoecakes.

A Pima brush-and-mud house. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



Some plants were carefully sought, and others were as carefully avoided. The Pima feared the dodder laurel, a parasite that clings to bushes and trees. They always kept a distance from this yellowish-white plant with its ghostly, stringlike stems. Some Indians believed the dodder grew above a rattlesnake or Gila monster den. They feared the Gila monster as much as the rattler, even though its poison is less dangerous. The Gila monster, which is the only poisonous lizard in the United States, can rarely kill a man. Other Pima Indians said the dodder was sacred to snakes. If a snake saw a man destroy a dodder, the reptile would follow and bite him.

With rattlers, Gila monsters, scorpions, and black-widow spiders to guard against, the Pima naturally sought plants to cure bites and stings. They favored a small, poisonous herb we call spurge, which grows close to the ground and has a lacelike appearance. If a man was bitten, he tried to squeeze the poison from the wound. Someone would quickly look for spurge and crush the stems over the bite so the juice ran into the openings. The victim also chewed the plant. Its poison made him vomit, and the Pima mistakenly thought this rid his insides of some venom. At the same time the spurge caused the person to sweat. This, the Pima believed, helped carry more of the venom from the victim's body. Actually, snake venom goes directly into the bloodstream, and no amount of vomiting or sweating would help to get rid of it.

In the absence of spurge, a man used sunflower as a snakebite remedy. He yanked up a plant, bit off a piece of root, chewed it to a paste, and plastered it over the wound. The Pima also collected an ashy gray lichen from rocks and rotting logs for use as a snakebite medicine. Many even believed it had magic powers that would keep them from being bitten.

Women carried the lichen in medicine pouches under their only garments, knee-length, cotton wraparound skirts. Men carried it in pouches or tucked into their narrow deerskin breechcloths. All the Pima thought its nearness brought them good health and luck. Even so, some men also feared it because it had a narcotic effect when smoked, and would not carry it in their breechcloths, for they believed it made a man insane if it rubbed against the skin for any length of time.

It is man's own fault, according to Pima legend, that rattlesnakes are dangerous. The story says the spirit who created all things made a handsome rattler. Attracted by the snake's beauty, people used it as a toy. They played tug-of-war with it, tied it in knots, used it as a whip, rolled it on the ground like a *mano* (a sort of Indian rolling pin), and wore it around their necks or waists as decoration. Tired of having sore ribs and an aching spine, the snake called on the creator for help. The creator told the rattler to open its jaws and, when the snake did so, attached two sunbeams to the roof of the snake's mouth.

As he went home, the rattler met a jackrabbit. Being jealous of the snake's beauty, the jack kicked it in the face. The snake lunged forward and bit the rabbit with the sunbeams, which had become fangs. Within an hour the jack died. Word of this startling event quickly spread, and after that only old and gentle Pima who were entirely without fear could handle a rattler without getting bitten.



A Mandan dressed for a pageant. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

CHAPTER NINE

On the Great Plains

Although the Keresan Indians thought their ancestors came from the east, they are not considered possible descendants of the Hopewell Indians. North and east of the mesa region once lived many tribes who might have been related to those Mound Builders. Several of these groups gave their names to regions tney occupied. Among them were the Missouri, Iowa, Kansa, and Dakota. Others who came west at about the same time were the Oto, Quapaw, Omaha, Winnebago, Osage, Ponca, Assiniboin, Crow, and Hidatsa. Scientists believe they came in four different waves, with the Dakota arriving last, perhaps in the 1600's. First to arrive were the Mandan, who settled along the Missouri River as early as the 1400's or even the 1300's.

Between the Mississippi River and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains stretched a region of grasslands and high plains, broken here and there by rolling hills, mountains, and forests. The Indians who believed they came from Ohio found a pleasant life in the grassy territory,

which became known as the Great Plains. The Mandan developed a distinctive way of living, and many of their neighbors led similar lives. When white men found them, the Mandan occupied a small region where the Heart River joins the Missouri in south-central North Dakota. Their legends said that the Heart River had been made especially for them by their creative spirit.

They honored many supernatural beings, and each man also had a guardian spirit. When a guardian spirit also happened to be one of the tribe's spirits, the Mandan thought it carried special powers. Legends accounted for many of the spirits. For instance, in one tale two Mandan men saw a hole in a bluff and crawled through. On the other side they found a land of giants, so they started back but found the hole blocked by a great snake. They killed it, and one man ate some of its flesh. After they got out of the hole, the man who had feasted became a snake himself. Thus the Mandan came to look on the snake as one of their supernatural creatures.

Any man felt blessed if the snake became his "medicine," or guardian spirit. Along with the bear and mink, the snake was considered more powerful than other spirits. To learn what his "medicine" would be, a young man fasted and underwent ceremonial tortures. By the time he reached his middle teens, he was used to fasting. He first went without food, for probably a day, when he reached the age of eight or nine. Thereafter he fasted regularly, winning respect from the people of his village by doing so. As he grew older, the fasts became longer. If he could fast for a week or two, the people showed him special respect.

To discover his guardian spirit, a Mandan might merely fast. Frequently, however, he ended the fast with torture. Members of a society in which he had purchased mem-

bership stuck small pointed pegs through the flesh of his chest or back. By rawhide cords attached to the pegs, his fellows hoisted him into the air and let him hang. His hunger, coupled with the pain, usually brought on hallucinations, which he paid a wise old medicine man to explain to him. Any animal figuring importantly in his visions became his "medicine." If his guardian was the mink, bear, or snake, people expected great things of him. Women also had guardians, which they inherited or acquired through fasting rather than through torture.

Each man collected a bundle of objects he considered sacred, and this sacred bundle took the name of his "medicine." A man whose guardian was the snake had a snake bundle. In it he included parts of plants supposed to contain magic, animal skins, feathers, presents his father had given him during fasts, and, undoubtedly, a snake skin or the rattles of a rattlesnake. If he was the oldest son, his father's bundle might come to him when both his father and mother were dead. He also might inherit bundles or parts of bundles from his mother's brothers. He could even buy bundles.

With each bundle went a ceremony. The acts to be performed during this ceremony usually came to the man in his visions when he learned what his "medicine" would be. He probably wouldn't understand the ceremony directions himself, but the wise man who interpreted his visions would explain them to him. A ceremony, in the form of a dance or pageant, took the name of the major animal involved. Ceremonies connected with snake bundles were snake dances, no matter what other animals took part. Each type of animal was generally danced by a man who had that animal for his "medicine."

A certain animal, such as the beaver, might be indicated through a costume made of the animal's skins. More

often, the men danced naked, with painting on their bodies to show what animals they were supposed to be. A snake had circles and curved lines down his back and legs to represent the markings of a serpent. The Mandan held snake-bundle ceremonies when they needed rain, when a sick person required a cure, or when braves sought victory on the warpath.

In the minds of the Mandan, snakes and cures went together. Men and women with snake bundles generally became doctors, though a person with another type of bundle might become a medicine man if he dreamed of snakes frequently. Women doctors often refused to kill snakes. On meeting a reptile, they chewed roots they carried in medicine pouches and blew the fine pieces in the snake's direction. Men, by contrast, felt they gained the strength of their "medicine," snake or otherwise, if they killed it. The act that gave them most power of all was killing a white buffalo. These albinos were rare, so a man gained power even if he merely purchased the skin of one from a neighboring tribe.

Buffalo played an important part in the lives of the Mandan. They took about half their food from this and other animals, and part of each summer the men were away from home on buffalo hunts. Unlike tribes who depended almost entirely on buffalo, the Mandan avoided hunting when weather presented its greatest hardships, in fall, winter, and spring. In addition to buffalo, the Mandan ate antelope, and pronghorn once roamed the Great Plains in large herds. The Mandan enjoyed deer meat. Catfish, sturgeon, and large turtles also served the Mandan as food, yet some of their neighbors would perish before eating one of these "water people."

The Mandan never sought bears as food, but a man killed one if he feared it might attack him. He was more



Descendants of Mandan, Winnebago, Sioux, and other Great Plains tribes raise milo (a sorghum) and many other grains besides corn today. (*Photo courtesy of Bureau of Indian Affairs*)

likely to eat the meat of wolf or fox, which he also trapped for the fur. To trap one of these wild dogs, he dug a deep pit and covered it with sticks. On the cover he put a rabbit or a piece of deer. When a fox or wolf rushed upon the bait, the sticks gave way and the wild dog fell in. A similar pit served for catching eagles. After the pit was dug, one man stayed in it while the others covered it and placed the bait. When the eagle swooped down, the man in the pit grabbed the bird by its legs. A good eagle catcher won great prestige in his village.

Eagle feathers had decorative uses and were also tied to arrows to give them steady flight. Feathers of hawks and crows as well as eagles might be used in ceremonial costumes, but they had little part in everyday dress. In summer, men wore no clothing at all. A woman wore a flap

of deerskin four to six inches wide and eight to twelve inches long that hung like an apron from her waist. In winter, the woman put on a knee-length deerskin dress, and men wore robes of buffalo or other skin. Both sexes wore leggings and moccasins. Shirts and breechcloths, often decorated with dyed porcupine quills, had ceremonial uses.

The other half of the Mandan's food came from their fields. The Mandan didn't need to rely entirely on animals, because they stayed in one location long enough to raise crops. After spring floods, they went to nearby bottomlands where the high waters had left rich soil. With hoes of buffalo or elk shoulder blades fastened to sticks, they broke the soil and planted corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco.

Corn was most important. The Mandan grew several

A Mandan buckskin shirt, with painted and beaded decorations. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



varieties, and the women cooked it in many ways. They prepared it by itself, made it into hominy, mixed it with beans, ground it and formed it into cakes, and even produced soups of it by mixing it with chokecherries or wild plums. Beans and squash also came in several varieties, and there were at least three types of sunflowers. Sunflower seeds, pounded into a flour, became bread, and dyes could also be made from the seeds. From the prairie the Mandan gathered wild food, particularly Juneberries and turnips.

Some of their neighbors feasted at times and starved at others, but the Mandan prepared for bad times. Living in permanent settlements, they could dig caves in which to store extra food. Below an opening just large enough for a person to squeeze through, the Mandan hollowed out rooms six to ten feet deep and ten to twenty-five feet across. They dried beans in the sun before storing them, and also dried strips of meat. They had no objections to the spoiled flavor of the meat. In fact, when they made kills, they hung the meat up to ripen instead of eating it fresh.

During a hunt, each man could usually tell which buffalo he had killed because of the feathers on his arrows. As soon as the hunt ended and the kills had been claimed, the hunters cut into the carcasses to remove the hearts and possibly other major organs. The leaders of the hunt had their choice of these, which they ate raw right then to gain courage and power.

During spring floods, the Mandan salvaged drowned buffalo and ate the meat, which many tribes wouldn't do. Thousands of buffalo died in floods. Probably more buffalo drowned every spring than were killed all year long by all the tribes of Indians who hunted them.

Mandan settlements held a hundred to three hundred

houses. They stood atop hills or at the edge of steep cliffs above the rivers. Any enemy had an uphill battle to reach a village. In addition, the Mandan surrounded their settlements with walls of logs and dirt and with ditches fifteen feet deep and at least that wide. Ladders, which could be drawn up out of reach, allowed the people to enter and leave a village. Enemies of the Mandan, such as the Cheyenne and Dakota, never captured one of these sites until white men came. With the whites came smallpox, and after that the Sioux, who were always much more numerous even though affected by disease, drove the Mandan from their traditional homes.

The Mandan frequently went to war, but they were considered peaceful compared to many of their neighbors. Much of their warfare, they claimed, was for self-defense and to get revenge for raids against them. Perhaps so, but they had weapons for war as distinct from those for hunting. They made bows of elm or ash, arrows and spears of ash with heads of stone, and knives and hatchets of stone with stick handles. Quivers to hold their arrows came from the skins of wildcat and wolf. Buffalo hides served to make shields.

Because the Mandan lived settled lives compared to many tribes, they had time to make excellent weapons as well as strong willow baskets and good pottery. They regularly traded these with their neighbors for food and furs. A settled life also allowed them to build sturdy houses.

The Mandan dwelling was part cave. The men dug circular holes forty feet or more across and up to two feet deep. They placed posts around the edge to keep the dirt from crumbling in. An inner framework of logs ten to fifteen feet high helped support roof beams that slanted up from the outside ring of posts. Over the beams, the Man-



A Mandan village and the clumsy round boats of the tribe. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

dan placed willow branches and covered them with dirt, which, when rounded into a dome, was one to three feet thick. They covered the dirt with a layer of clay that kept rain from seeping through. At the center of the roof, a smokehole permitted stale air and smoke to escape.

A person didn't walk directly into the house. He passed through an extranceway, a covered aisle that extended out from the house six to ten feet. The floor inside the aisle slanted down, being at ground level at the outside end and at the house's floor level at the inside end. A buffalo skin hung over the inside opening to serve as a door.

Inside the house, woven willow mats served as seats. These surrounded the fireplace, a pit dug inside the

framework of poles that helped support the roof. Beside the fire pit, the women kept black clay pots that could be set right in the fire, bowls of wood and clay, and stirrers or ladles of buffalo horn. Against the walls stood the beds of the several families occupying each house. These consisted of buffalo hides stretched between poles, with furs as mattresses and blankets. Each bed held several people.

Once inside a house, a Mandan had plenty of head room. But being taller than many North American Indians, both men and women had to stoop to enter the five-foot-high entranceway. They differed from most of their neighbors in other ways besides being tall. Almost all of them had fair skins; other Indians called them "half-white." Some Mandan had blond hair. A few had blue eyes, and many had brown eyes instead of the black eyes of most Indian peoples. Early white visitors to the Mandan thought this meant their ancestors had come from Europe.

A Welshman thought he understood some of their words, and started a rumor that the Mandan were descendants of the Welsh. No modern anthropologists, however, believe the Mandan came from Wales. It is possible that the ancestors of these people associated with some Vikings or Irishmen who reached North America hundreds of years before Columbus.

The Mandan had one domestic animal, the dog, but they kept some wild creatures in their houses. Medicine men kept owls because the Mandan believed these birds had the power to foretell the future. And any man wanting to be a war leader might keep a hawk or eagle, from which people thought he drew strength. It wasn't enough, however, that he owned an eagle. To become a war leader, he had to show ability when serving under other leaders, and he had to dream encouraging dreams.

If a man became an able war leader, he might be picked by the people as a chief. To help ensure this, he gave freely of food and skins. No stingy Mandan ever became a chief. Since young hunters were expected to give food to old people who had no sons, a man found plenty of chances to hand out gifts. If, in addition, he had the fortune to shoot a white buffalo, he almost certainly became a head man.

Any bird with red feathers, such as a cardinal or woodpecker, might be kept in the house to drive away evil spirits. The Mandan believed reddish birds were spirits that could outwit even the powerful snake spirits. One of their legends tells about this.

They said a snake came into a village in human form, and no one realized what he was. He had no noise makers with him, so couldn't have been a rattler. Perhaps he was a smooth green snake, hog-nosed snake, blue racer, bull snake, garter snake, or king snake. He challenged other men to a game, one that the Mandan played as boys. They had a hoop covered with strips of hide, at which they threw sticks as swift runners dashed past with it. The hide strips, woven tightly, held the sticks in place, so players could see which stick struck closest to the center. The village men bet their belongings against those of Snake Man, but his stick always came nearest the center of the target.

Most men quit playing against Snake Man, but one young man wouldn't give up. He lost everything he owned and began to bet the possessions of his parents. Before long, Young Man had lost nearly all his family's belongings. They went about the village naked even in cold weather and had only straw for a bed. At last the father complained.

In the village lived Brown Old Man, really a bird in

disguise. He had once been powerful, because his father was mighty Red Bird. But men had finally caught Red Bird and pulled out his feathers, which left him weak. This had also weakened Brown Old Man. Even so, Young Man knew of no one else to help him. Taking presents of food and moccasins, as Mandan always did when seeking favors, Young Man asked Brown Old Man for aid. The old one felt pleased, as he had been ignored since his father's downfall. He had one powerful song left with which to work magic.

When Snake Man went to sleep, Brown Old Man sent Young Man to pull up two sticks standing before Snake Man's house. These were the sticks used in the hoop game. They turned out to be snakes. When Snake Man threw one at the moving hoop, it twisted to hit the target near the center. The one Young Man threw always twisted away from the center. They did it too quickly for men to notice.

Now Brown Old Man sang his song over the snakes,

Indians acquired horses from white men; the Mandan and others used them to replace dogs in pulling travois. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



and they became real sticks. At the same time, Brown Old Man provided Young Man with highly prized eagle feathers with which to bet. Young Man was to say that his friends, feeling sorry for his parents, had given them to him.

When he played against Snake Man the next time, Young Man won. They played again, and once more Young Man came closer to the center of the hoop. Sometimes Young Man lost, but more often he won. He gave the skin bed and winter robes back to his parents. He won the belongings other people had lost and returned them to their rightful owners. At last Snake Man had only his own possessions left. One by one he lost these. Yet he was so sure his magic could win that he bet his house. After it was gone, he bet the one thing he had left—his wife.

Brown Old Man knew Snake Man would throw his very best to keep from losing his wife, who had strong magic. So Brown Old Man took the place of one of the young men who carried the hoop. He guessed Snake Man hated him (why would snakes eat beautiful birds if not out of hatred?), and he was right. When Snake Man saw Brown Old Man running with the hoop, his anger caused him to lose his mind. He threw at Brown Old Man instead of at the hoop. Without his wife, Snake Man had no magic left. Young Man took her for his wife. Now he had power, but he used it for good; Snake Man had a fit of coughing up dirt and died.

Mandan storytellers stretched stories such as this one out for hours, even days, with time out for daily tasks. Everything in a legend usually took place four times. A storyteller won special honors when he included enough additions that his story lasted four nights. By the time white men recorded Mandan legends, it was often impossible to tell what the original elements of a tale had been.



CHAPTER TEN

Near the Rocky Mountains

Unlike the Mandan, the Piegan enjoyed war. From their camps in southern Alberta and northern Montana, they searched for other tribes to attack. Their neighbors called them Blackfoot, or Blackfeet, because they wore dark moccasins. Perhaps their shoes became darkened as they walked through ashes and soot left by prairie fires, but probably they used dye on their footwear as well.

Other tribes, such as the Crow and Sioux, had clans known as Blackfeet. So the Blackfoot tribe is often called the Siksika, from an Indian name meaning "black-footed." The tribe can be broken down into the Piegan, the Blood, and the northern Blackfoot. The Blood and northern Blackfoot lived in Canada; the Piegan occupied both

The Blackfoot "buried" their dead in trees, and a widow might sit under the body for many days. (*Photo courtesy of Bureau of Indian Affairs*)

sides of the border. Piegan can be translated as "those with worn robes."

The Piegan believed much of the world had been created through violence. According to one Piegan legend, the earth had been made by Napi, or Old Man. He lived in the sky, and day after day he looked down on water. Wondering what was under the surface, he created animals that could dive—duck, otter, beaver. When they found nothing, Napi made the muskrat which returned to the surface with mud between its paws. Napi blew on the mud until it swelled into a great land—the earth.

In one legend, the creator himself made the features on the earth. In a different version, Napi created the animals, including a man, his wife, and their two sons. And the humans were supposed to make the features that would turn the flat land into a worthwhile place on which to live. The work went slowly. The man wanted the woman to do most of it, and the woman spent her time dreaming. Each day they went their individual ways to work, but neither one did much. When the man blamed the woman for doing so little, she grew angry. She remembered seeing a piece of a limb lying under a tree. She went to get it, probably to hit the man if he found fault with her again. To test if it would make a solid club, she pounded on the tree.

To the woman's surprise, a man-sized snake with a horn on its head came crawling down the tree. She was too frightened to run or cry out. About halfway down the trunk the snake jumped, and by the time it hit the ground it had turned into a beautiful man. Now the woman was happy, for she had someone handsome to talk to.

The two sons discovered the mother's secret and reported it to their father. At first he didn't believe them,

but one day he checked for himself and learned the truth. The next day the husband ordered the woman to go work in a new place. After she left, the husband put on some of her clothes and fixed his hair like hers. He went to the tree. Taking up the club, he beat on the trunk. Down came the snake, as usual jumping the last few feet to the ground. As it turned into a man, the husband clubbed it to death.

The woman had only pretended to go where she had been sent. She had circled around to come to the tree. When she arrived, she found a dead snake and saw her husband going off in the distance. Snatching up the club, she gave a wild cry and started after him. The man called the sons and the three fled before the angry woman. Now the man regretted he had not worked harder to build the world, for he could find no place on the smooth surface to hide. But as they ran, he built great forests of trees. These slowed the woman down, but she found a way to get through. So the man built high mountains. These slowed the woman down again, but she found a way to get over. At last the man made a great ocean behind himself and the sons, and this stopped the woman for a time.

By building the ocean, the man separated the earth into the Old World and the New. In the New World he built more forests and mountains, for he had decided it didn't pay to be lazy. He also built lakes and rivers. One of these received the name Oldman River, after the creator Napi, or Old Man, and it can be found today in southern Alberta.

As the man finished building the features of the earth, the woman found a way to reach the New World. She continued the chase. Fearing he could never escape her on earth, the man leaped into the sky and became the sun. The woman leaped after him. Being weaker, she fell

short and became the moon. The two sons felt left alone and made themselves companions—the Piegan—who revered the sun as their most important ancestor.

Although the creation legend indicates the Piegan's forefathers came from Asia, the people believed their ancestors came from the northeast. Scientists say they probably came from due east, from Manitoba and Minnesota.

The Piegan were among the most westerly of Algonkian-speaking Indians. It seems possible that their ancestors came from Asia and traveled east with other people of the same language group. At some point they decided to start back west, perhaps following the buffalo on which they came to depend. Or, being warlike, they may have caused trouble in the Algonkian group, and were driven from it. While other members of the band went on to the eastern woodlands, the Piegan returned west to the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

After reaching the Rockies, the Piegan settled down. But they didn't build permanent villages. As the buffalo roamed, the Indians had to wander in search of them. Only if they thought they would remain settled for a summer did the women plant beans, squash, and sunflowers. They might plant sweet corn, since it ripened sooner than flint corn, but generally they did little field work, for they expected to move frequently.

A Piegan camp moved in an hour or so if the leaders gave the word. The lodges, or tepees, came apart easily. To build a lodge, an Indian cut long, slender poles. His wife stuck three or more of them in the ground at an angle so that their tops crossed and could be fastened together. Over this framework, the woman stretched half a dozen undecorated buffalo skins sewn together with sinew. Stakes around the circular base held the cover to the ground, but at one place a flap remained loose as a door-



Buffalo helped the Piegan decide where they would live. (*Photo by Chester Fry, courtesy of United States Department of Agriculture*)

way. The skins were tailored to fall short of the narrow point at which the poles met, leaving a hole for the escape of smoke that rose from buffalo droppings, or chips, burned as fuel.

To move a lodge, a woman pulled up the stakes and poles. She rolled these and the skins into a bundle, which she could carry on her back if necessary. Usually, dogs did the carrying. The dog was the one domesticated animal of the Piegan. A woman crossed two of the lodge poles over a dog's shoulders so an end of each pole dragged behind and to each side of the animal. She tied the rest of the lodge parts between the poles behind the dog's tail. On this travois, a dog could drag fifty to seventy-five pounds. Since the Piegan made neither clay pots nor woven baskets, loads seldom became too heavy. On her own back in a bag of buffalo skin the woman often carried her bone and light wood cooking utensils.

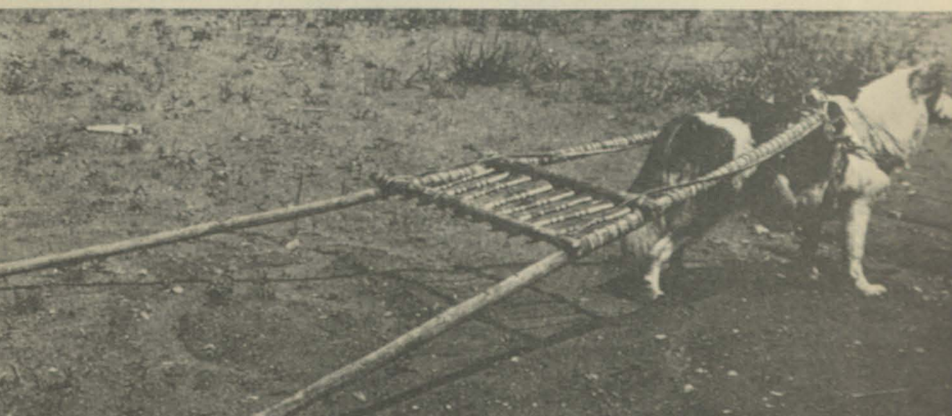
Women of a chief's family looked after moving a camp's sacred lodges. At one time, few of these, with their decorated skins, existed. Many camps had but one, dedicated to the sun god, and there may not have been more than fifty in all of Blackfoot land. A decorated lodge held tribal belongings considered to be sacred, such as white buffalo hides. The designs on such lodges often represented ani-

mals and usually resulted from a dream of a chief or medicine man.

About the time white men reached the West, some individuals had begun decorating their personal lodges. Each such lodge had a spirit watching over it, such as a snake or otter. The owner of a snake lodge kept a snake skin in a sacred bundle inside. He would ask a wise old man to draw snakes on his tepee skins, with wavy lines to represent their paths.

A camp moved when scouts gave the signal. Throughout the trip, scouts kept some distance ahead and to the sides of the band to watch for danger and food. The advance guards also scared small game out of the way. Otherwise the dogs, seeing a rabbit or badger, would try to give chase, and the belongings on a travois might be scattered across the countryside. The main body of men marched in a circle around the women, who watched over the dogs. Men carried no burdens, as they had to be free to ward off attackers.

A Piegan dog travois. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



If a woman who expected a baby developed labor pains she stopped, while the rest went on. If all went well, she would follow the trail of the others after she had given birth. She saved a section of the child's umbilical cord—the channel through the navel by which the baby had received food and oxygen while still in her body. A medicine man would make a bag for her in which she could keep this piece of umbilical cord.

For a boy's umbilical cord, the man made a snake-shaped bag. Because a snake sheds its old skin but always has a new one underneath, the Piegan thought it lived a very long life. They hoped a boy would do the same. For a girl's umbilical cord, the shaman fashioned a bag to resemble a lizard. Since a lizard's skin is tough, the people wanted a girl to grow up to be equally sturdy and able to do most of her family's work, except fight wars and shoot buffalo.

The leader of a group wasn't the oldest or wisest man among the relatives that made up a band. He was someone who had won fame in the hunt and on the warpath. If he faltered or shot poorly at any time, the people who treated him as chief one day might ignore him the next. In camp his lodge stood in the center, with the lodges of other people in a circle around him. When several groups met together, the leaders' tepees formed a small circle in the heart of the camp.

Groups often met in summer, particularly near huge herds of buffalo. They made camp far enough from the herd to keep the barking of dogs from frightening the big animals away. For the hunt, most of the men left camp, leaving behind with the women, children, and dogs only a small group of old men and teen-age boys to watch for enemies. The hunters spread far afield to encircle the buffalo. Once they surrounded the herd, the leader sig-

naled for them to close in. Getting close enough to shoot, they tried to kill as many animals as possible and stopped only when the milling beasts broke out of the circle and fled. In close contact, a man tried to drop buffalo with a spear. If the number of hunters was small, the men often set a circle of fire around the quarry to keep the beasts from stampeding away.

The Piegan also hunted with a form of ambush. The main body of men hid in the prairie grass downwind. A few hunters circled to the upwind side of the herd and started to make noise. As the buffalo ran from the noise-makers and their scent, they neared the hiding men, who leaped to their feet and shot or speared as many animals as possible. If a cliff was handy, the Indians tried to drive the buffalo over it to their deaths.

When temperatures fell and flights of ducks and geese appeared overhead, the Piegan moved toward wooded or hilly areas. They knew fall would drive the buffalo there, where trees and hills would shelter them from snows and icy winds. Now the Indians built a pen, with one side open, at the foot of a hill. If a buffalo herd came that way, the people tried to chase it into the corral. Women and children might be placed along the route the Piegan wanted the animals to take. The hunters drove the buffalo forward, and the women and youngsters jumped up and down and shouted if the animals started to turn aside. All the people closed in behind the animals as they went into the pen, forming a human fence along the one open side.

Immediately after a kill, the women butchered. As soon as they opened the carcasses, they removed the livers, and everyone helped eat these raw. The Piegan believed this brought them luck in future hunts, and it also helped satisfy their immediate hunger. The livers eaten in the

first spring kills also provided vitamins that the Indians needed badly after a winter of poor hunting.

Winters were long and cold, and full of snow. Like the buffalo, the people moved to wooded valleys to get protection from the winds. At this time they divided into small family groups, for food became scarce in winter. Although they had snowshoes, they went in search of buffalo only on sunny days. They feared the sun god objected to their hunting during storms and when days were gloomy. When food had been plentiful during summer, they had feasted. In winter they often grew hungry, for the meat they jerked or turned into pemmican seldom lasted for long periods. To jerk meat, they cut it into thin slices and dried it in the sun. For pemmican, they dried meat, pounded it to a mush or powder, moistened it with fat,



A sacred tree trunk with medicine, or "magic" sticks, fastened to it to help the Piegan in the hunt. (*Photo Courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



The Blackfoot also hunted pronghorn antelope. (*Photo by Marvin L. Dixon, courtesy of United States Department of Agriculture—Soil Conservation Service*)

and mixed it with saskatoon berries, serviceberries, or chokecherries.

Besides buffalo, the Piegan hunted foxes, wolves, rabbits, bear, beaver, mink, marten, deer, elk, and moose. They wanted these animals mainly for skins, and some people ate the flesh only if starvation forced them to. Bitterroot, camas bulbs, and wild turnip provided vegetable food. The camas bulbs had to be boiled or roasted for two or three days before they became soft enough to eat. Taboos forbade the Piegan to eat grizzly bears, fish, snakes, lizards, and some birds. They were also forbidden to eat white buffalo or the otter, sacred animals whose meat went into the ceremonial bundles kept in the lodges dedicated to the sun god.

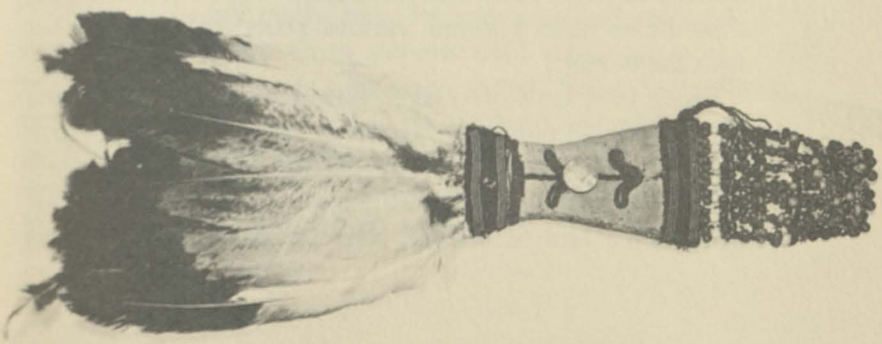
Various animal skins might be used in clothing, but most garments for winter came from buffalo skins. Deer hides served for summer clothes, since they were lighter in weight and cooler. The Piegan men wore sleeved shirts, breechcloths, leggings, and moccasins, often with fringed edges. The women had simple sleeved dresses and mocca-

sins. In winter both sexes put on buffalo robes with the fur worn on the inside.

For decoration, the women dyed porcupine quills and sewed them to their garments. Beads came into use after Europeans arrived. Men also wore eagle feathers in addition to tying them to their arrows to help give their weapons accurate flight. The Piegan climbed cliffs in the Rockies to reach golden-eagle nests. One or two men would lower another man by a rawhide rope to the nest when the young were feathered out but not ready to fly. A man's wife could sew feathers to his war bonnet or robe only with good reason. Each feather represented a brave deed in battle or on a hunt, and the way in which a feather was attached told other Indians what the man had done. When going into battle or to hunt, a man wore his finest clothes. The Piegan believed that if he got killed he should arrive at the sun god's home looking his best.

Naturally, a brave tried to ensure that he would escape death. Before going on the warpath, he sought the help of an old man he respected. The old man made him a package of sacred objects. Perhaps the warrior erected a special tepee in which the old man built a fire to cause the young man to sweat. If all the evil came out of

A Piegan eagle-feather fan, with beaded rather than porcupine-quill decoration. (*Photo Courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



the brave, he could enter battle without fear. In return for these services, the young man gave the old one gifts of food and clothing.

A warrior also sought visions to find out if his future looked promising. In addition to fasting, he cut himself and underwent other forms of torture to cause hallucinations. If a dream or vision included an animal, the Piegan took this to be a message and asked a medicine man to explain it. The dreamer believed he could acquire the animal's characteristics. He also prayed to powerful animals, hoping to acquire the attributes of the bear, wolf, buffalo, or elk.

If a man's visions included the beaver, everyone considered him to be blessed. He became a member of the beaver society, which supposedly had power over buffalo, and he no longer had to hunt. Instead, he sat in his lodge, singing and chanting to cast a spell over the animals hunted. The hunters believed he helped them be successful, so they brought him a generous share of the kill.

Sometimes a man returned from a battle or a hunt with a broken bone or other injury. Then a medicine man would boil bear grass, and the brave held the injured part over the steam. Like all tribes, the Piegan had many plant medicines. For colds, they smeared the resin of balsam fir on their chests. For ailments of the eyes they washed the eyes in a weak horsemint brew. For snakebite, a medicine man chewed various roots and blew them onto the wound.

Being in a land of severe winters and short summers, the Piegan encountered far fewer snakes than the more southerly tribes. They saw garter snakes, hog-nosed snakes, and western racers. The only dangerous reptile of which they had to beware was the prairie rattler. This

thick-bodied, five-foot snake blended with prairie grasses because of its greenish-yellow color broken with brownish blotches. The Piegan had a legend to explain why few snakes lived in their land and why bears were so scarce.

The hero of the legend was a flashing light in the sky —a comet. He looked at earth and saw that old women and young women needed help. Bears caused old women to starve by eating their food, and young women lived as captives in the lodge of rattlers. The comet came to earth and became the man Smoking Star. After butchering a large herd of buffalo, he took choice pieces of meat to the lodges of old women. When bears came to steal the meat, Smoking Star killed them with a white rock knife.

This done, Smoking Star went bravely to the lodge of the snakes. Without hesitation, he walked to the back of the tepee and sat down. The chief snake awoke, saw him, and rattled loudly to waken the others. With the chief in the lead, they crawled toward Smoking Star, who waited with the white rock knife in hand. The chief raised its head to strike, but Smoking Star slashed its head off. The others rushed upon him, but with a few sweeps of his sharp blade he killed them too. After cutting the young women free, he called on the men to take them as their wives. Then he disappeared, returning to the sky. From that day on the prairies had few bears or rattlers, old people were never allowed to starve, and young men and women were free to marry.

This last wasn't really true. Parents arranged the marriages of teen-agers. Some parents paid attention to the wishes of young people, but many didn't. Even if a girl's parents married her to a man she disliked, everybody expected her to be faithful to her husband. But no one expected the man to be faithful to his wife. Among the Piegan Indians, it was a man's world.



The Snake Indians depended on plants for food, and some women wore plant-fiber skirts. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

By the Snake River and Farther South

Across southern Idaho winds a river long ago named the Snake by some Indian tribes. Beside it once lived Indians also called the Snake, but no one knows for sure why the river or the people received this name. Since Algonkian-speaking tribes called all their enemies snakes, the people along the Snake River may have received their name from the Piegan, who tried to wipe them out. The Piegan even went so far as to call them Rattlesnakes.

Another common name for the people along the Snake River was Shoshone, or Shoshoni. The origin of this name has also been lost. Perhaps *shoshone* is a Cheyenne word meaning "snake people." Or perhaps it comes from *shont-shonip,* an Indian expression meaning "much grass." The Snakes always camped where plenty of grass grew on the plateaus of the Rockies.

Two main branches of Snake Indians dwelt in the Rock-

ies. Except for living in the mountains, the northern (sometimes called the eastern) group followed a life similar to that of the Piegan. They lived by hunting and devoted much of their time to fighting. Sacajawea, the famous woman who helped guide Lewis and Clark across the Rockies, belonged to this northern group. But the western branch had completely different customs and greatly contrasted with tribes we have already met. They lived in Utah, Nevada, and north of Death Valley in California.

The Snake believed they descended from Coyote, a powerful spirit as well as an animal. After he had been created by the sun, which the Snake Indians worshiped, Coyote made people from clay. Hearing a coyote howl on a clear night, the Snake thought good luck was on its way to them. Like the coyote, they ate many animals, some that other tribes left alone. Squirrels, prairie dogs, pocket gophers, packrats, yellow-bellied marmots, and many other small creatures became food for the Snake.

Some of the Snake hunted the pronghorn antelope. To get near a herd, a man would cover his head and body with an antelope skin with the head still attached. These Indians also hunted mountain sheep, and for this reason sometimes went by the name Sheepeaters. Their dogs would chase the sheep to a dead-end ledge, where the hunters shot them.

Reportedly, the Snake at one time used poisoned arrows in the hunt. It has been said they took a piece of deer liver and placed it on a hill of large red ants. Not knowing what the liver was, the ants bit it to drive it away, injecting their venom into it. The Indians later dried the meat, ground it to a powder, and rubbed it into the chipped surfaces of their flint arrowheads. The ant venom remained powerful.

The Indians supposedly used some of the poison to catch wolves. After gouging out a hollow in a fallen tree trunk, the Snake filled the pit with fat well mixed with poison. Wolves licked it and usually died quite close to the log. Many modern scientists doubt such stories. They may have grown out of Snake legends, but these Indians did hunt wolves for their skins as well as for food.

The western Snake didn't live mainly on meat. Their diet consisted mostly of plant foods. Unlike the hunters and farmers, the Snake were gatherers, traveling about the mountain plateaus in search of vegetable food. All manner of seeds could be dried, pounded into a flour, and turned into sun-baked bread. Because this was a very ancient way of life, early white explorers in the West considered the Snake to be more primitive than many tribes. Other Indians looked down on them, too, calling them "diggers" and "walkers." They carried sharpened sticks with which to dig roots, camas bulbs, and the like. Even after most other tribes acquired horses, the western Snake traveled on foot.

One early observer said the Snake ate grass. He claimed they hibernated in winter, sleeping in dens like woodchucks or real snakes. He said they crawled from their caves on all fours in spring and ate grass until they regained enough strength to stand up. This yarn had some truth, for the western Snake did move into caves in late fall. Before leaving the open plateaus, they collected seeds, roots, and meat. With their digging sticks, they broke into the tunnels of gophers, chipmunks, and other rodents that store plant foods. They robbed the animals and added the supplies to their food collection, which they carried in well-woven grass baskets.

But the Snake couldn't sleep through the winter, for no humans can, and by spring they had grown thin and

weak. No matter how well they saved food for winter or how much hunting they did when snows lay on the ground, the Snake always needed more food. But they crawled from their winter quarters on all fours only to escape low roofs. Roofs needed to be less than five feet high to make most of the Snake bend down. These Indians lacked the stature of many of the Great Plains tribes, and women were sometimes hardly more than four feet tall.

The Paiute, or Pine Nut Eating Snake, had an explanation for their shortness. When Coyote created them, he placed them on mountain plateaus near the valleys of dwarfs. The little people could make themselves invisible, and came into the camps of the Snake. Here they became visible and took some of the local women as wives. When the Paiute discovered that very small, very dark, very large-mouthed babies were being born, they guessed what had happened. Eventually, they destroyed the little people in a fire. But the damage had been done by the dwarfs, and the Snake remained short, with square jaws, wide mouths, and dark skins.

Having wintered in caves, the Snake built brush and grass houses for the rest of the year, always with an entrance toward the rising sun. Sometimes they leaned bushy branches together to make a wickiup framework. Over this they piled brush, and into the brush they wove grass. When weather remained warm and clear in summer, the Snake often left the top of the house open. They really had a windbreak rather than a wickiup.

In summer, men wore breechcloths, and women wore small aprons woven from pounded sagebrush fibers. A very poor man went naked. But women always had to wear a little cover, for a legend said any Snake seeing an entirely nude woman would go blind. As cold weather

Paiute brush shelters (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



The poorer the Shoshone man was, the fewer were the clothes he wore. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

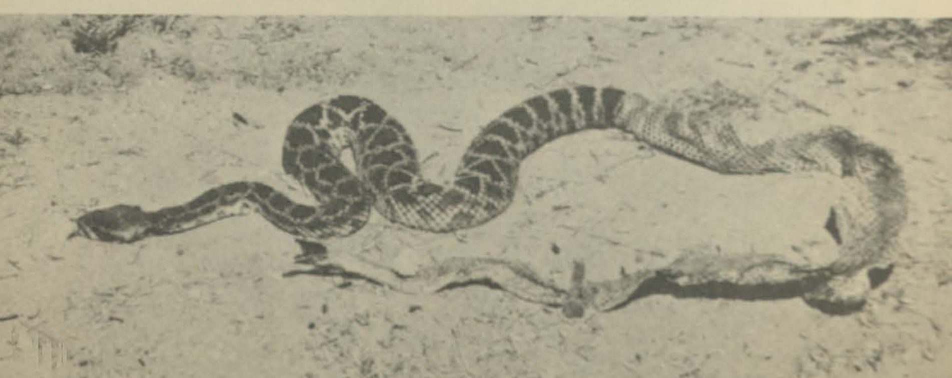


came on, men wore animal skins. If a man had only a few skins, he wrapped his feet in them first. A few more hides allowed him to cover his legs. After that he wore something over his shoulders; his torso and arms got covered only if he had plenty of pelts. The people who were well off wove robes of cottontail or jackrabbit skins. A full cloak required more than three dozen skins, and these were rare.

A man wore an eagle feather in his hair or made a cap of a weasel skin to protect himself from ghosts. If he had a headache, he tied feathers from the tail of a flicker around his head. He also shot doves, crows, and hawks for their feathers and to eat, but he never harmed a chickadee. According to Snake legends, Chickadee created the world and so was very sacred. Yet the coyote, also sacred, could be hunted, and a man supposedly gained power by killing one.

Another sacred creature was the rattlesnake. Men usually killed rattlers only to protect themselves, and medicine men handled them. All other snakes in Snake territory could be eaten. The people ate whip snakes, western racers, gopher (bull) snakes, king snakes, long-nosed snakes, garter snakes, and fangless night snakes. The fangless night snake could make a man sick with its

A rattler in California shedding its skin. (*Photo by S. E. Piper, courtesy of United States Department of the Interior—Sport Fisheries & Wildlife*)



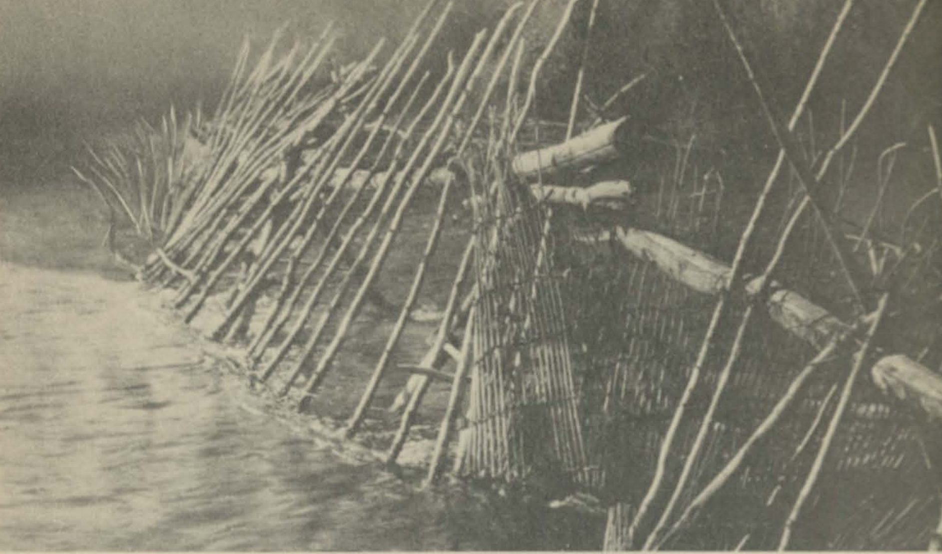
bite. Although it lacks fangs, it has large teeth in the back of its mouth down which a mild poison flows. It uses this poison to kill lizards, on which it lives.

The Snake Indians also ate lizards. In their area they found whiptails, leopard lizards, utas, many types of skinks, several kinds of swifts, and the horned lizard that is mistakenly called the horned toad. One dark blue to black lizard, perhaps the western fence lizard or a young four-lined skink, served as a medicine. The reptile's body would be dried and pounded to a powder, which the medicine man tied over a patient's broken bone.

A man had to be approaching death before his family called in a medicine man, as people preferred to treat ailments themselves. They knew many "cures," such as putting hot stones on a man who had chest pains. If the stones didn't help, the man ate a type of mint known as skullcap. Another mint, self-heal, supposedly helped a nearsighted person see better. Stomachache called for eating wild geranium leaves.

Certain treatments could be handled only by medicine men. People supposedly got sick if their spirits left their bodies or if an enemy put a curse on them. To cure these types of ailments, a shaman employed songs, let a rattler crawl up his arm, or interpreted dreams. A man often became a medicine man because of his own dreams, and any person who dreamed frequently of snakes might be taken by an old shaman to learn the medicine man's secrets.

In case of a bite by a poisonous reptile, a special medicine man would be summoned. His guardian spirit, the buzzard, supposedly had more power over rattlers than any other spirit. If no buzzard shaman could be found, a man who looked to the deer as his guardian had to serve.



A Snake fish trap. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

The deer medicine man would be the next best person with the power to cure the victim.

Before the coming of white men, medicine men held positions of power in a clan. Chiefs didn't exist. The Snake way of life left little need for them. In summer, the people broke up into small family groups and went their separate ways most of the time. Each man was a leader of his family. But at certain times of the year, all members of a clan came together. The Pine Nut Eaters might gather in fall, when pine nuts were collected. The Salmon Eaters formed a large camp in spring, when salmon, trout, or chub were easily caught in nets woven of plant fibers. Sunflower Eaters met as sunflowers ripened, and Squirrel Eaters met when leaves fell and tree-dwelling animals could be seen easily.

During large gatherings, coming-of-age ceremonies took place for girls in the early or middle teens. Some

groups held rites for boys as well. These "dances" took place around a willow pole, and they had the added purpose of bringing success in some undertaking, such as a hunt. Medicine men played an important part in the ceremonies. A shaman supposedly had power to cast a spell over any creature hunted, even if it was only the grasshopper.

The Snake Indians dug pits in the middle of grassy areas. Forming a circle around the pit and far back from it, they beat the grass with sticks to frighten out grasshoppers. They drove these insects toward the center of the circle, where the pit awaited them. Before eating the hoppers, the Snake toasted them over fires or boiled them in stews.

Large meetings also allowed young men to look around for young women to whom they were not closely related. Sometimes parents arranged a marriage. At other times a girl willingly spent a night with a young man and from then on was his wife. A man might wait for a chance to catch a girl alone at a stream or in a berry patch. He would capture her, although she never cried out and rarely struggled very hard, and thereafter they were man and wife. If a girl left her husband, her family sent her back to him. But if the man walked out, the woman could go back to her family, unless one of the husband's brothers wanted her. Brothers were looked on as the closest of relatives.

Western Snakes rarely fought about anything. They lacked weapons for making war and retreated from enemies unless forced to defend themselves. When white men arrived in the mountains, mainly after the discovery of gold and silver, the Snake remained peaceful.



CHAPTER TWELVE

In Central California

A tribe of Indians in California might be descended from groups who came south from Alaska, after crossing to the New World from Asia. Some scientists believe the Pomo Indians, north of San Franciso Bay, were such a tribe. Other anthropologists claim the Pomo are descended from Aztecs and came north from Mexico.

To support the idea of an Aztec relationship, observers of Pomo life turn to a creation legend. Different Pomo groups had a variety of creation stories, but one concerning the creation of people in the world can be found among most of the groups. The elements in it correspond closely to elements found in Aztec tales.

In the Pomo creation story, Marumda, or Coyote, the major creator, made people from rocks. He put them in the valleys, and on the mountains he put various types of

Where they once hunted animals to eat, or snakes for ghost ceremonies, California Indians now take part in logging operations. (*Photo courtesy of Bureau of Indian Affairs*)

animals. He put birds on one mountain, mammals on another mountain, lizards on a third, and on a fourth he put gopher snakes, king snakes, rattlers, red-striped (ring-necked) snakes, mountain garter snakes, and others.

With the creation finished, Coyote looked about at his handiwork. Most of it gave him pleasure, but the people angered him. Instead of living peacefully, gathering grass seeds and fishing for salmon, they spent time killing one another and being unfaithful. He destroyed them with a flood. But the valleys were empty without them, so he made a new group of people. These, too, misbehaved, and he brought down fire to wipe them out. After his third try at creating people, Coyote found them to be no better than the first two sets. This time he ended their existence with snow and ice. He tried a fourth time, again found the people doing hateful things, and eliminated them with a whirlwind. The fifth group of people he created was the Pomo tribe.

In all this activity, the animals from the various mountains got scattered about the world. However, some Pomo groups, who are not called clans since they are mostly small families, have stories for the creation of individual animals. For instance, Coyote created the rattlesnake to bite women, who were supposed to stay home during their menstrual period but didn't. He put the snake in ripening grass. When one of the women came with her grass-beating stick to knock the seeds into a basket, the rattler bit her. Coyote saw to it that she got well, but from then on Pomo women remained at home when tribal regulations said they should.

A variation of the creation legend gave the people the right to eat most snakes and lizards. In this version, the mountains with the different animals as well as the valleys burned in the great fire. Afterward Coyote feasted on the

roasted reptiles, so some Pomo said it was all right for people to eat them. Others refused to consider any of them as food, and no Pomo ate rattlesnakes.

But the story doesn't end there. After eating, Coyote grew thirsty and searched until he found water. He drank too much and became ill for four days, but the bullfrog opened him with an obsidian knife. The water ran out and formed Clear Lake, which lies about a hundred miles north of San Francisco Bay and was long a center of Pomo settlement.

Almost always the snakes in Indian legends are men. Among the Pomo, the gopher snake had feminine characteristics. Her legend shows the Pomo didn't rate women too highly. She was unfaithful to her husband, who kicked her off a cliff into the ocean. She was able to swim and reached a rock, where she gave birth to her children and raised them.

Another snake-woman of the Pomo was a monster, one of the most feared among this tribe of Indians. She served the purpose of keeping people from doing acts considered taboo. In her natural form this woman-monster, Bagil, had a long, snakelike body, though she could take other forms. If anyone was seen doing something forbidden, someone would later say Bagil had been watching, and the person would become ill within a few days. Many of the people probably did—from worrying about having been seen by Bagil.

To cure someone made ill by Bagil, four shamans treated the person in a special building—the ghost house, which was set aside for certain ceremonies. Here, the shamans would run around blowing whistles. At the end of the treatment, all four left the ghost house to remove their special medicine-man costumes in a secret place. After that the head shaman returned and bathed the

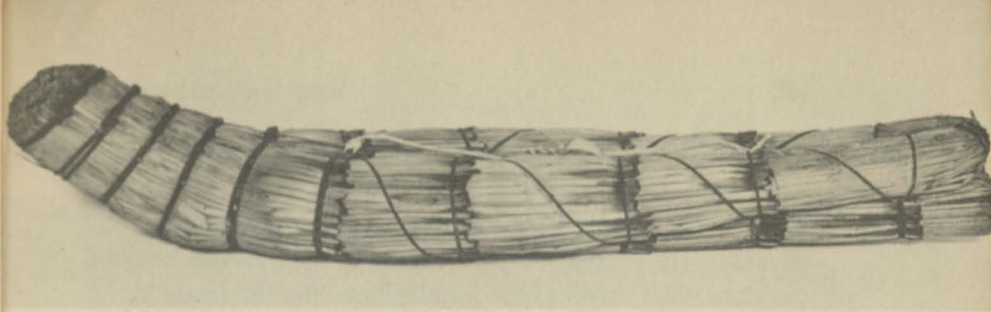
patient in cold water. After this, the patient was supposed to be able to rise and walk home a well person. Since his mind would have been relieved of worry by the ceremony, he probably did get up and go home feeling much better.

Ordinary people knew how to "treat" some illnesses. They relieved rheumatism pains or tuberculosis by pulling a gopher snake across the patient's belly. But if a family had no idea of what troubled one of its members, it sent for a medicine man.

Medicine men among the Pomo were of two kinds—sucking and singing. The sucking kind looked after minor pains and ailments. He would pierce the skin over the pain and suck out blood. If the illness seemed serious, he studied it, decided what it was, and then reported this to a singing shaman. With chants, whistles, rattles, and a ceremony of some sort, the singing medicine man provided the "cure." He also gave medicines, a portion of which he had to eat or drink himself before giving them to the patient in order to prove that a medicine wasn't a poison.

Among the Pomo, a medicine man's main chore was to help in cases of poisoning. Few people ever really got poisoned, but all of them feared it might happen. An enemy who wanted to poison a man could do so from a distance, the Indians thought. All he needed was some of the victim's hair, eyebrows, broken fingernails, or waste products. The Pomo took great care to bury these things where no one would find them, to keep them out of the hands of their enemies.

The enemy probably made a figure of clay or wood to represent the man he wanted to poison. With a few hairs from the man's head, or something else associated with him, the poisoner made a magic brew that included snake



The Pomo used plants for many things besides food; this boat was made of tule rushes. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

venom, red-ant poison, or liquid squeezed from a bee sting. He smeared this on the figure. Or he might stuff a lizard with the concoction and bury the animal in or near the victim's home. In a few days the man was expected to become ill. Sucking and singing shamans treated many ailments as if they were cases of poisoning. All medicine men expected fees, often paid in shells from the Pacific coast. If the patient died, the shaman would return the fee, whereupon the mourners gave more than half of it back to him.

A man gave considerable attention to his hair. Not only did he try to keep it out of the hands of other people, but he wore it in different ways on different occasions. Both men and women wore their hair long. At times they let it hang down their backs; at other times they rolled it on a deer-bone hairpin. This hairpin could be decorated with feathers of different colors—orange from an oriole, red from a woodpecker's head, green from the neck of a mallard drake, and blue from a jay.

When going to war, a man had to be especially careful to keep his hair out of the hands of an enemy. At this time he wore it tied up in a milkweed-fiber net. Over the net he often wore a hat of eagle or buzzard feathers. The hat supposedly provided magic, for the Pomo had great respect for the large birds of prey.

The Pomo decorated their noses and ears as well as their hair. Boys and girls had their ears pierced before they reached their teens. The mother performed the operation with a sharpened bone, after which she packed the hole with maidenhair fern. When the ear healed, the mother stuffed more and more fern into the opening until a wooden plug could be stuck through. The plugs, made of willow, were six to eight inches long and about as big around as an ordinary lead pencil. Feather or shell decorations on the ends of the plugs provided color. Only men wore nose plugs. They pierced the septum—the soft tissue between the nostrils—when a boy reached his midteens. The plug, made of elder wood, carried shell decorations dangling from each end.

All women and a few men had their bodies tattooed in purple. A sharp deer bone served as the tattooing needle, and the blossoms of violets were crushed and mixed with soot to make the dye. Old people had their knees tattooed in an attempt to cure rheumatism when drawing a snake across their bodies didn't help.

Although these Indians wore much in the way of decoration, they wore little in the way of clothes. Pomo men usually went naked much of the year. On chilly days, they wore blanketlike robes made from rabbit skins, woven crane feathers, or woven tule fibers. The tule, a type of bulrush, served the Pomo in many ways. All fishermen had tule robes, which gave them some protection when icy waters splashed over them. If a man who was not a fisherman wore a robe of tule, it probably meant that he was poorer than someone with a robe of feathers or skins. A very wealthy man or a person of importance might have a robe of sea-otter skins.

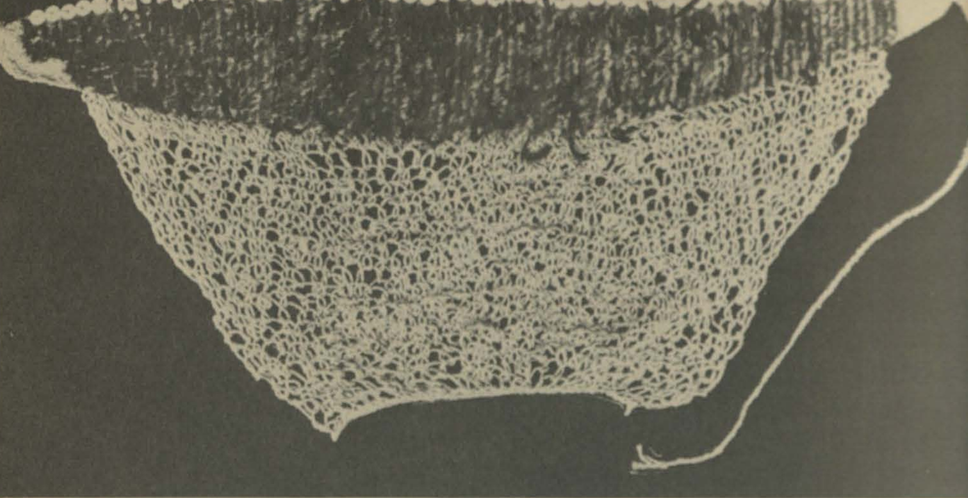
Women wore short deerskin wraparound skirts, with the fur toward the body. For cooler weather they had a

wraparound dress, which came up under the arms and was worn over the short skirt. They also added robes of tule or occasionally wildcat skins. The inner bark of the redwood tree could be shredded and used in place of tule, as could willow bark. A woman in her midteens or older decorated her clothing with flicker feathers or shells, but a girl not yet old enough to marry had four stripes drawn on her skirt to show she was still a child. Both men and women put on moccasins and perhaps leggings of deerskin in cold weather.

The men hunted deer, squirrels, rabbits, bear, and even mice for food, and fished for salmon, sucker, and trout. Besides dogwood and willow arrows and spears for hunting, they used a sling of deerskin, which they whirled around their heads to give the rock force. To fish, they used a small bone from a deer's leg baited with a worm. A plant-fiber string was tied to the center of the bone. When a fish swallowed it, the bone turned crosswise and couldn't be dislodged. In a similar way, the Pomo caught cranes and other large birds. Using a bone from a rabbit, they baited it with a small fish, a frog, or a salamander. The bone turned crosswise when swallowed, and a stout fiber string fastened to it kept the bird from escaping.

A Pomo youngster learned to know birds and mammals well. Taboos said he couldn't eat members of the dog family—the wolves, coyotes, and foxes. In fact, the Pomo didn't have domestic dogs or any other domestic animals. Occasionally a woman raised a deer, rabbit, or raccoon as a pet. If a deer was too young to eat grass, the woman would let it nurse at her breast along with her baby.

The woodpecker could be caught for its feathers, but shouldn't be eaten because the Pomo considered it to be the world's oldest bird. Owls should be shot, since they supposedly were birds of ill omen, but no one ever ate an



Netted headdress. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

owl. Because they feared hawks, the Pomo never harmed them. They left the hummingbird alone, also. Because of its unusual flying abilities, they thought it had special powers. Plenty of birds remained to be eaten, such as duck, goose, quail, robin, sparrow, crane, pigeon, blue jay, and meadowlark. The Pomo also ate grasshoppers, caterpillars, earthworms, snails, abalone, mussels, eels, and barnacles.

Actually, the Pomo ate more vegetable food than meat. The main item in their diet before white men came was the acorn. They also ate buckeyes, grass seeds, hazel nuts, pine nuts, blackberries, salmonberries, huckleberries, strawberries, and holly berries. Elderberries and manzanita berries could be made into refreshing drinks.

Much of the time the Pomo ate well, but if the acorn crop was small, many people went hungry. Breakfast and dinner were the only meals of the day. In good times, the

Pomo stored food, knowing bad times might come. The women wove storage baskets, at which they were experts; in these they kept their excess food. They could produce a magnificent basket, so tightly woven it would hold water.

Houses could be built of bark strips from oak or cottonwood trees, but where available, the bark came from the redwood. Most Pomo built round houses, with a floor space ten to fifteen feet across. One stick six to eight feet long stood in the center to hold the strips. The people were generally tall, some men being about six feet, so they stood upright only near the middle of the house. At one place the Pomo left out one strip of bark, providing the entrance. When they wanted to close the house completely, they had a strip of bark handy to lean over this opening.

If a man had many children—six or more—he and his wife and youngsters usually lived by themselves. Smaller families often lived two to a house, as long as the total number of people didn't come to more than a dozen. The two families would be closely related, and the oldest woman owned the house. Among Indians who lived in small houses, women usually owned them, perhaps because they did the building. A woman's word was law in her home, and the women had more rights than early white scholars recognized.

In time, the center pole began to rot and sag. The people checked the bark strips to see which ones remained in good condition, cut new strips to replace any that were rotting, and built a new home around a new center pole. But if anyone died in a house, even a new one, the people burned the building. Each house had a yard. A circle of brush around the home showed how much land went with it, and in this yard the family dried plant foods.

The women and children of a household usually had tule mats, laid on the dirt floor, to serve as beds. In time, the Pomo built beds of sticks, with tule mats over the crosspieces, but these may have come into use only after the Indians encountered white people. When a husband spent a night at home, he slept on the mat of his wife. But husbands had another "house" in which they often spent the night.

The sweat house, or fire lodge, had a major place in every Pomo settlement. It was a men's club, though very old women who suffered from the cold could sometimes gain admittance. This lodge was fifteen to forty feet long and ten or more feet high, though it was often built in a pit and so appeared to be a low building. A fire burned down the center lengthwise, and men sat in rows on either side of the blaze.

The two rows of men made up teams. Part of the activity in the fire lodge was a game. With fans, the men waved the heat from the fire toward their opponents. Each team tried to send more heat toward the other side than it received. If any man became too hot to remain in his place and moved back, he brought discredit to his side. The team with the fewest moves during the course of the game was the winner.

In his midteens, a boy entered the sweat house on receiving an invitation, usually from one of his mother's brothers. He belonged to the side that this uncle sat on, though he didn't join the "heat-eating" contests at first. Instead, he listened. If he made a disturbance, the fire tender sent him for wood. If he continued to be noisy, he would be made to hold a live coal in his hand. That usually quieted a boy. While sitting in the background, the young men learned what was expected of them as they became adults. They also heard the legends of the Pomo.

Following the evening "heat-eating" contest, the fire died down. Men who intended to spend the night stretched out on mats. In the morning, another great fire was made. The men who had gone home for the night returned, and another contest might be held. When it ended, all the men and boys sprang to their feet, raced to a nearby stream, lake, or the Pacific Ocean, and plunged in, no matter how cold the water.

The ghost house also had an important place in the Pomo village. It was used for special ceremonies and sometimes for helping to cure sick people. Men mourned

A beautiful Pomo storage basket, so large it could hold two women. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



their dead relatives in it. Bigger and deeper than the fire lodge, it had a tunnel for an extrance. It, too, belonged to the men, though women entered on certain conditions. The men performed secret rituals in the ghost house, but public Pomo ceremonies took place in front of it.

In one ghost-society ceremony, dancers performed with a gopher snake before the ghost house. On finishing the dance, they threw the snake into the crowd. The people tried to catch or touch the snake for luck. A woman who wanted a baby tried to wrap it around her hips. This, she thought, would bring her the good fortune of having a child.

Another ghost ceremony involved a rattlesnake. A leading shaman (a *yomta*) and a special helper, or snake swallower, went into the hills to find a rattler. They carried a blanket made of rabbit skins, a rattle, tiny shell beads, and beautiful small feathers. Shaking his noise maker to make a rattler think a mate was nearby, the *yomta* and his helper looked for a suitable reptile. When they found one, they supposedly spread the blanket before it and laid the beads and feathers on the blanket as an offering. The rattler crawled onto the blanket to eat the objects there. Pleased with its meal, it crawled up the *yomta's* arm and onto a stick of wormwood he carried. It rode down to the village on the wormwood.

What actually happened was that, after getting out of sight of the village, the *yomta* cut a forked stick. Finding a rattler, he pinned it to the ground by quickly placing the fork of the stick just behind its head. While the snake swallower held the stick firm, the *yomta* sewed the reptile's mouth shut. They wrapped the snake around the wormwood, holding it in place by force, and returned to the village.

At the village, the *yomta* stretched the rattler on the ground amid more beads and feathers. The swallower stepped forward, picked the reptile up, turned his back, and "swallowed" the snake. A moment later he spun around and, coughing and spitting, brought the snake up. Actually, the swallower slipped it down inside his costume. A string tied to the snake's tail kept it from getting away. By pulling on this string with his hands in front of his mouth and neck, the swallower appeared to "unswallow" the rattler. While the *yomta* kept the people busy with the next part of the ceremony, the swallower carried the snake outside the village, cut the fibers that held its mouth, and let it go free.

The Pomo knew the regions around their territory well. In addition to being gatherers, fishers, and hunters, they were traders. They provided the tribes farther inland with the small shell beads that served as wampum. The women traded their excellent baskets, and men bartered bows made of yew, nutmeg, or manzanita. In exchange they received furs and food. Yet they feared the people with whom they did business. Any stranger might be a poisoner, and they handled his payment with care until they felt sure it held no deadly magic.



CHINOOK WOMAN AND CHILD.

Flattening a baby's head, as was done by many northwest coast Indians. (*Photo courtesy of New York Public Library, Picture Collection*)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

On Puget Sound and Georgia Strait

It seems logical that Indians who had few snakes around them would have few snake legends. On the northwest coast of North America, from Oregon to Alaska, Indians seldom saw snakes. The people who lived around Puget Sound and farther north saw mainly garter snakes, gopher snakes, western racers,. sharp-tailed snakes, and rubber boas. Of these, only garter snakes proved numerous.

Many of the people living in the northwest spoke a language called Salishan. The origin of the name has been lost, but the Indians who spoke Salishan are still called the Salish. Some groups of them lived as far inland as Montana, and are known as Interior Salish, while those along the Pacific Ocean and its inlets are the Coast Salish.

Those along Puget Sound in Washington and Georgia Strait in British Columbia lived similar lives. Their way of life differed considerably from that of a hunter, a

farmer, or a gatherer. The Coast Salish lived primarily by fishing.

According to the legends of some of the Coast Salish, their ancestors had lived as hunters in the Far North. This could indicate they had come from Asia by way of Alaska. In the north they shot caribou, bear, ptarmigan, and grouse. But because animals were so plentiful in the northern forests and hunting was always good, they began to waste food. Their creator grew angry at the way they destroyed animals, and he let the sky fall on them. This flattened their heads. It also cut off daylight and they couldn't see to hunt.

At last the people propped up the sky with poles. The sun came under the edge and shone for them. As it crossed the sky, it remained in sight day after day. When it reached the far side, it went up over the sky and back to its starting place. During the time it was on the other side of the sky, they had no sun day after day. That is why, the people believed, the sun could be seen for twenty-four hours a day in midsummer and couldn't be seen at all for many days in winter. The people didn't care for this arrangement and moved south.

In time the people came to a coast where the weather remained mild. Rain fell frequently, but the people never had to wade in snow. They decided it would be a good place to live, for there seemed to be plenty of food. Looking around, they found rivers and streams filled with fish, so, although they didn't give up hunting entirely, they became fishermen. They caught mainly salmon, herring, halibut, sturgeon, flounder, and steelhead trout; but especially salmon.

When the fish left the ocean in spring to swim upriver to their egg-laying grounds, the Coast Salish caught them with weirs of red-cedar poles. A weir is a netlike fence of

sticks and rushes woven and lashed together so that water can pour through, but fish are stopped. As the fish jammed against the weir, the fishermen netted or speared them from shore, from swinging walkways above the weirs, or from canoes. Although they feasted in good times, the Coast Salish would dry and store supplies for times when fishing was poor.

In most parts of Canada and the United States, Indians could dry meat by placing it in the sun. Because of frequent cloudy or rainy weather, the Coast Salish found it necessary to dry their catches over fires. They made fire by twirling a red-cedar stick in a board. Soon, the dry leaves or fern roots in the hole would grow hot enough to ignite. But rather than start a fire by the stick-twirling method every time they needed one, the Coast Salish kept fires burning steadily in their homes and carried live coals in clam shells with them when they traveled. They also used fern roots as punks, which kept sparks glowing for long periods.

Ancient Indians probably got fire from trees struck by lightning. But their descendants told lively tales to explain where fire came from. One such legend among the Coast Salish included a snake, probably a bull snake, commonly called a gopher snake in the West.

At one time, according to this story, fire existed only above the sky. Animals made plans to steal it. They sang songs to see who had the best plan, and Coyote won. Thereby he became the leader. His friend Wren shot an arrow against the sky, and it stuck there. Wren shot a second arrow into the end of the first one and another into that one and on and on until a chain of arrows reached the ground.

The chain wouldn't support Coyote, Bear, or Mountain Lion, so Wren crawled up. He carried a rope, which he

fastened to the sky. All the other animals then climbed the rope. Bear started up last. Always hungry, he tried to carry two baskets of food on his back instead of one, as each of the others had done. This proved too heavy, and the rope broke when he was partway up. He was so fat that he bounced when he hit the ground and wasn't hurt.

Coyote sent Snake and Frog to find the fire lodge. Frog went first. Snake, having eaten all the food in his basket, grew hungry. To feel less hungry, he licked Frog's feet. Frog tasted good, and Snake couldn't stop. He swallowed Frog. Snake went back and reported that Frog had been eaten, but he did not say who had done it. More important, he reported that fire was kept in Curlew's house. He said Curlew also kept a weir, behind which all fish lived.

Coyote told Beaver to get fire. Beaver went above the

Salish Indians in boats. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



weir and dived in. Pretending to be dead, he floated downstream and was caught in the weir. Curlew thought his fur would make a beautiful robe, so he carried Beaver inside the fire lodge and tossed him in a corner.

Coyote knew what was happening. He sent Eagle flapping awkwardly to Curlew's house as if injured. Eagle landed on the roof. The Curlew people rushed out to capture him. Beaver leaped up, snatched a coal from the fire, and rushed outside. The Curlews saw him and gave chase. Hiding the spark under his claw to keep it dry, Beaver dived into the stream, catching a fish as he did so. He reached the rope, and he and all the other animals from the earth climbed down. When they came to the end of the rope, where Bear had broken it, they dropped. They landed on Bear and so weren't injured. They gave fire to people. Beaver put his fish in a stream and in this way provided the earth with fish.

Coyote occurs again and again in Salish legends. Other common animals of Coast Salish stories are the raven and the skunk. Perhaps the bear of the fire-stealing legend was a black bear, common near the northwest coast.

The Coast Salish ate black-tailed deer, mountain lion, wildcat, porcupine, woodchuck, raccoon, marten, otter, and beaver as well as bear. From the sea or nearby islands they took sea lions, hair seals, and porpoises. More to their liking were clams and fish eggs. The Coast Salish harpooned killer whales, though sharks and whales were taboo to some of them. If sea foods and mammals were scarce, they shot ducks, geese, snipe, and gulls.

Most of the Salish would not eat wolves, coyotes, foxes, mink, ravens, owls, or any reptiles. Rather than eat taboo animals, they turned to fern roots, wild parsnips, currants, Oregon grapes, huckleberries, cranberries, strawberries, dewberries, and salmonberries.

A man showed his wealth by giving away large quantities of food. He would invite friends to a feast and shower them with presents. He considered it wise to give away food, furs, and fishing equipment because he knew he'd get gifts in return. The potlatch, or *patshatl*, as the gift giving and feasting were called, put his friends in his debt. They felt they had to give a potlatch to keep from being obligated. Every man probably hoped to get back more presents than he gave.

Families, rather than single men, gave potlatches. Coast Salish families generally lived together, with smaller houses holding at least four closely related families. The houses were rectangular, with a stout pole at each corner. The two poles at the front corners stood taller than the two at the back. This allowed the roof of cedar bark or board strips to slope, so that rain easily ran off. Wealthy people might have a house that rose to a peak, or gable, which shed water to both sides of the building rather than to the back. The men lashed cedar boards or bark strips between the corner poles to form the walls. The door would face toward the stream or other water beside which a house always stood.

Using stone and bone cutting tools, the Salish had trouble getting the cedar boards to fit tightly together. Houses let in drafts, but as long as they kept out rain, the Indians felt comfortable. If the drafts were too bad, the families would close gaps with ferns or moss. Some people wove mats of tule or horsetail rushes and hung these on the inside walls. The mats kept breezes out and heat in.

If some families in a house moved to a good fishing area in summer, they built a less sturdy home for the warm months. This might be a simple lean-to. Or it could be a small hut of rushes.

Inside the regular home, each family of a four-family

house had a corner. With more than four families, some of the groups had their places along the side walls. The head woman of each family built a fire, so at least four fires burned at all times. Each family kept its own wood supply, its own utensils, and its own food. If a man fared well in fishing or hunting, he might give food to others in his house, hoping that the others would not let him go hungry if he had a poor catch or hunt. True generosity had little to do with giving.

The Salish ate twice a day, in the morning and evening. Ordinarily they ate off tule mats, using their fingers. They had wooden bowls, but these served for special occasions. For bowls and other wooden cooking utensils, the Salish used maple. Cedar, which served for many purposes, gave an unsatisfactory flavor to food. The Salish seldom ate fresh meat, but dried it first. Before eating it, they moistened the dried meat by dipping it in fish, porpoise, or seal oil served in clam shells.

An old-time Salish dwelling. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)



To cook meat, a woman placed it on coals or put it on a stick that was held over the fire. She also cooked by steaming. To do this, she put glowing coals in a pit and placed fern leaves or kelp over them. The meat lay on this bed of vegetation and was covered with another layer of leaves or kelp. After sprinkling water on the leaves, the woman covered the whole pile with a mat or dirt. Steaming proceeded slowly. She often put the food to steam when the family went to bed, so that it would be ready for the morning meal.

If a woman cooked fish on a forked stick, she almost always took it off the stick to eat it. A superstition said that if a woman ate something directly off the two prongs she would give birth to twins. But even though most women didn't want two babies at once, they would treat twins well. Among many Indian tribes, one or both of the babies would be put to death. But the Coast Salish looked on twins as special people. Some tribes thought twins had been salmon before they came into the world. For this reason, they said, twins had the power to call salmon to the fishing places.

When fish didn't arrive at fishing areas as usual, the Salish thought someone had broken a taboo. Perhaps someone had neglected to throw fish bones back into the water. The people believed the bones developed into new salmon if returned to the nearest stream or sound. Each man had a song to help call the fish. He usually acquired it in a dream and sang it in private, often while taking a sweat bath.

The Coast Salish lacked the sweat houses of the Pomo Indians. Instead, a man would build a small structure of sticks covered with bark or mats, just large enough for himself or perhaps himself and his closest friend. After he heated rocks at the fire in his house nearby, he put them in

the little house and poured water over them to make steam. He believed that, as the sweat poured from his body, the evil deeds he had done also ran out. This supposedly left him clean inside as well as out, and he believed fish came to a clean man. At other times he might use the sweat bath to treat a cold or a headache. Women also took sweat baths.

In their sweat houses the people wore no clothes. Men, in fact, gave little thought to garments except on chilly days. Old men, particularly, went naked, and among some tribes the younger men also went without clothes. Those who did wear something usually had an apron of cedar bark or animal skin hanging from a belt. Women wore skirts of cedar bark or skins.

To make cloth of cedar, the people took the inner bark and soaked it until it became soft. Then the women pounded it until it fell apart in thin strips. Some were left the natural, pale yellow color, but the women dyed others black or red before weaving them to make cloth.

Rainy and cold days called for additional garments. The Salish made small, basketlike rain hats from cedar roots, tule, other rushes, skins, or feathers. Capes to ward off rain or spray when a man fished came from the same materials. In chilly weather, a man put on a blanketlike robe with a hole in the center. This might be made of tule, but some tribes wove their robes of dog hair, and wealthy people had animal furs. A woman might wear a sleeveless dress, fastened over her shoulders with pieces of bone. She, too, put on a robe at times. Men and women fastened robes under their chins with a piece of bone and around their waists with a belt. If robes provided too little warmth, the people smeared themselves with bear or deer fat. They also used fat to keep from sunburning in summer or to protect themselves from biting insects.



A Salish rattle carved from mountain-sheep horn, used in ceremonies to call fish. (*Photo courtesy of Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*)

Only the wealthy or people of high rank wore clothes for decoration. Among Indians north of Mexico, only the northwestern tribes had classes, or ranks, which developed as the groups became settled and grew conscious of wealth. The people of the lower classes also had ways to make themselves attractive according to Coast Salish standards. Men and women wore abalone and other shells in their ears and noses. A man might have several holes spaced along the outer edge of his ear and have a small shell in each hole. Both men and women wore necklaces, and women wore decorative bands around their arms and ankles. A woman of a high-ranking family might have her lower lip pierced in order to wear a shell in it. Such a decoration is called a labret.

The Coast Salish often painted their bodies, but only a few were tattooed. When they did tattoo themselves, they punctured the skin with a snake's tooth or a thorn and rubbed in soot. Body paints had to be renewed occa-

sionally, for the Coast Salish bathed every day no matter how cold the water was. If a child objected to entering cold water, his mother whipped him with the prickly needles of a spruce branch until he waded in. All children learned to swim nearly as soon as they learned to walk.

The Coast Salish changed the shape of their heads, but this was not considered decoration. They said the ordinary human head looked like that of a dog. Besides, when the sky fell on their ancestors and flattened their heads, it was a sign the people should go on changing the shape. A mother would strap her baby flat on his back to a board of cedar. She would tie another board to the first above the child's head. Fastening this second board down across the baby's forehead, she fixed his head in a vise. In time, the front and the back of the head became broadened and flattened, almost rising to a point.

If a baby cried while having his head flattened, his mother sang to him about his spirit. Each man supposedly had a spirit—some animal—that watched over him. When he built a house, a man could have a figure of his animal carved on a post of the door frame. After his death, his family might have a figure of his spirit carved atop a pole that stood at his grave. These are totem poles, of the type made before white men arrived. The tall, many-figured, storytelling totems found among the Haida and Tlingit Indians of British Columbia and Alaska have been carved in more recent times.

A man worried about his spirit. He cared for it by obeying tribal taboos. If he grew sick, his friends wondered if he had killed fish without reason. Some groups believed that the great salmon spirit took away the spirit of a man who destroyed fish unnecessarily. When this happened, the man grew sick. The salmon spirit carried the

captive spirit toward the salmon home in the ocean, and the closer the salmon spirit got to the home the sicker the man became. If the salmon spirit reached its home, the man died.

To keep this from happening, the family or a medicine man called on other powerful spirits for help. First they might ask for aid from frog spirits. If the man remained ill, the people turned to the snake spirits for assistance. The snakes had more power than the frogs. More powerful yet were the fish spirits, and the people called on these as a last resort.

No two Indian tribes in the United States and Canada were exactly alike, but they all resembled one another in relying heavily on their natural surroundings. Everything had a reason for existing in their world and could be explained by a story. Many groups had tribal laws that led to the conservation of their natural heritage, and which make one wonder if the destructive ways of modern civilization are really civilized. Although it appears to be too late to give North America back to the Indians, it is not yet too late to protect the rivers, lakes, redwoods, coyotes, or bull snakes that meant so much to the early inhabitants of the land and which are just as vitally important today.

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